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THE

WORKS

OF

JOHN OWEN, D.D.

EDITED

BY THOMAS RUSSELL, M.A.

WITH

MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS,

BY WILLIAM ORME.

VOL. XVI.

CONTAINING

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SERMON XIV.*

THE

GLORY AND INTEREST

OF

NATIONS PROFESSING THE GOSPEL.

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* This sermon was preached, at a private Fast, to the Commons assembled in Parliament.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE

COMMONS OF ENGLAND

ASSEMBLED IN PARLIAMENT.

I NEED not give any other account of my publishing this ensuing short discourse, than that which was also the ground and reason of its preaching, namely, your command. Those who are not satisfied therewith, I shall not endeavour to tender farther grounds of satisfaction unto, as not having any persuasion of prevailing if I should attempt it. Prejudice so far oftentimes prevails even on good soils, that satisfaction will not speedily thrive and grow in them. That which exempts me from solicitousness about the frame and temper of men's minds and spirits, in the entertainment of discourses of this nature, is the annexing of that injunction unto our commission in delivering the word of God: it must be done, 'whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.' Without therefore any plea, or apology, for whatever may seem most to need it in this sermon, I devolve the whole account of the rise and issue it had, or may have, on the providence of God in my call, and your command. Only I shall crave leave to add, that in my waiting for a little leisure to recollect what I delivered out of my own short notes and others (that I might not preach one sermon, and print another), there were some considerations that fell in exciting me to the obedience I had purposed. The desire I had to make more public, at this time and season, the testimony given in simplicity of spirit to

the interest of Christ in these nations, and therein to the true, real interest of these nations themselves, which was my naked design openly managed and pursued with all plainness of speech (as the small portion of time allotted to this exercise would allow), was the chief of them. Solicitations of some particular friends gave also warmth unto that consideration. I must farther confess, that I was a little moved by some mistakes, that were delivered into the hands of report, to be managed to the discountenance of the honest and plain truth contended for, especially when I found them without due consideration exposed in print unto public view. That is the manner of these days wherein we live. I know full well, that there is not any thing from the beginning to the ending of this short discourse, that doth really interfere with any form of civil government in the world, administered according to righteousness and equity; as there is not in the gospel of Christ, or in any of the concernments of it. And I am assured also that the truth proposed in it, inwraps the whole ground of any just expectation of the continuance of the presence of God amongst us, and his acceptation of our endeavours about the allotment and just disposal of our civil affairs. Let others lay what weight they will or please, upon the lesser differences that are amongst us on any account whatever; if this shield be safe, this principle maintained and established that is here laid down, and the just rights of the nation laid in a way of administration suited unto its preservation and furtherance, I shall not easily be cast down from my hopes, that amongst us poor, unprofitable, unthankful creatures as we are, we may yet see the fruit of righteousness to be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for evermore. For those then who shall cast their eye on this paper, I would beg of them to lay aside all those prejudices against persons

or things, which their various contexture in our public affairs may possibly have raised in them. I know how vain, for the most part, expectations of prevailing in such a desire, by naked requests are. But sick men must be groaning, though they look for no relief thereby. Wherefore committing it into that hand, wherein lie also your hearts and mine, I shall commend it for your use unto the sovereign grace of him, who is able to work all your present works for you, and which is more, to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified. So prays,

Your servant in the work of

Our Lord Jesus Christ, and his gospel,

JOHN OWEN.

SERMON XIV.

Upon all the glory shall be a defence.—Isa. iv. 5.

The design of this chapter is to give in relief against outward perplexing extremities from gospel promises, and the presence of Christ with his people in those extremities. The next intendment of the words in the type, seems to relate to the deliverance of the people of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, and the presence of God amongst them upon their return; God frequently taking occasion from thence, to mind them of the covenant of grace, with the full ratification and publication of it by Christ, as is evident from Jer. xxxi. and xxxii. and sundry other places.

As to our purpose, we have considerable in the chapter: The persons to whom these promises are given; the condition wherein they were; and the promises themselves that are made to them for their supportment and consolation.

First, The persons intended are the remnant, the escaping, the 'evasion of Israel,' as the word signifies, ver. 2. they that are left, that remain, ver. 3. who escape the great desolation that was to come on the body of the people, the furnace they were to pass through. Only in the close of that verse, they have a farther description added of them, from the purpose of God concerning their grace and glory; they are written among the living, or rather written unto life; 'every one that is written,' that is, designed unto life in Jerusalem.

As to the persons in themselves considered, the application is easy unto this assembly: Are you not the remnant, the escaping of England? Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Are you not they that are left, they that remain from great trials and desolations? The Lord grant that the application may hold out, and abide to the end of the prophecy.

Secondly, The condition that this remnant, or escaping had been in, is laid down in some figurative expressions concerning the smallness of this remnant, or the paucity of them that should escape, and the greatness of the extremities they should be exercised withal. I cannot insist on parti-

culars; it may suffice that great distresses and calamities are intimated therein; and such have the days of our former trials and troubles been to some of us.

Thirdly, The promises here made to this people, thus escaped from great distresses, are of two sorts: Original, or fundamental; and then consequential thereon.

1. There is the great spring, or fountain promise, from which all others, as lesser streams do flow; and that is the promise of Christ himself unto them, and amongst them; ver. 2. He is that branch of Jehovah, and that fruit of the earth, which is there promised. He is the bottom and foundation, the spring and fountain of all the good that is or shall be communicated unto us; all other promises are but rivulets from that unsearchable ocean of grace and love, that is in the promise of Christ; of which afterward.

2. The promises that are derived and flow from hence, may be referred unto three heads: (1.) Of beauty and glory, ver. 2. (2.) Of holiness and purity, ver. 3, 4. (3.) Of preservation and safety, ver. 5, 6.

My text lies among the last sort, and not intending long to detain you, I shall pass over the other, and immediately close with that of our present concernment.

Now this promise of ver. 5. is of a comprehensive nature, and relates to spiritual and temporal safety or preservation. Godliness, though it be not much believed, yet indeed hath the promises of this life, and that which is to come.

I shall a little open the words of the verse, and thereby give light to those which I have chosen peculiarly to insist upon. It is, as I have said, safety and preservation, both spiritual and temporal, that is here engaged for; and concerning it we have considerable.

[1.] The manner of its production; I will create it, saith God. There is a creating power, needful to be exerted, for the preservation of Zion's remnant. Their preservation must be of God's creation. It is not only not to be educed out of any other principle, or to be wrought by any other means; but it must, as it were by the almighty power of God, be brought out of nothing; God must create it. At least, as there were two sorts of God's creatures at the beginning, that dark body of matter, whose rise was merely from nothing; and those things which from that dark con-

fused heap he made to be other things than what they were therein; it is of the last sort of creatures, if not of the first. If the preservation of this remnant be not out of nothing, without any means at all; yet it is for the most part from that darkness and confusion of things, which contributes very little or nothing towards it; I will create it, saith God; and whilst he continues possessed of his creating power, it shall be well with his Israel.

[2.] For the nature of it, it is here set out under the terms of that eminent pledge of the presence of God with the people in the wilderness, for their guidance and protection in the midst of all their difficulties and hazards, by a pillar of cloud, and a flaming fire; this guided them through the sea, and continued with them after the setting up of the tabernacle in the wilderness forty years. The use and efficacy of that pillar, the intendment of God in it, the advantage of the people by it, I cannot stay to unfold: it may suffice in general, that it was a great and signal pledge of God's presence with them for their guidance and preservation; that they might act according to his will, and enjoy safety in so doing. Only whereas this promise here respects gospel times, the nature of the mercy promised is enlarged, and thereby somewhat changed. In the wilderness there was but one tabernacle, and so consequently one cloud by day, and one pillar of fire by night, was a sufficient pledge of the presence of God with the whole people: there are now many dwelling-places, many assemblies of mount Zion; and in the enlargement of mercy and grace under the gospel, the same pledge of God's presence and favour is promised to every one of them, as was before to the whole. The word we have translated 'a dwelling place,' denotes not a common habitation, but a place prepared for God; and is the same with the assemblies and congregations in the expression following. The sum of all is, God, by his creating power, in despite of all opposition, will bring forth preservation for his people, guiding them in paths wherein they shall find peace and safety.

Only ye may observe the order and dependance of these promises; the promise of holiness, ver. 4. lies in order, before that of safety, ver. 5. Unless our filth and our blood be purged away, by a spirit of judgment, and a spirit of burn-

ing, it is in vain for us to look for the pillar and the cloud. If we are not interested in holiness, we shall not be interested in safety; I mean, as it lies in the promise, and is a mercy washed in the blood of Jesus; for as for the peace of the world, I regard it not. Let not men of polluted hearts, and defiled hands, once imagine that God cares for them in an especial manner. If our filth and our blood, our sin and our corruption abide upon us, and we are delivered, it will be for a greater ruin; the way unto the cloud and pillar, is by the spirit of judgment and burning.

The words of my text are a recapitulation of the whole verse; and are a gospel promise given out in law terms; or a New Testament mercy, under Old Testament expressions.

I shall then briefly shew you these two things: 1st. What is here expressed, as to the type and figure; 2dly. What is here intended, as to the substance of the mercy promised.

1st. For the figure; by the glory and defence, a double consort, or two pairs of things seem to be intended: The ark, and the mercy-seat; the tabernacle, and the pillar of fire.

(1st.) For the first; the ark is oftentimes called the glory of God; Psal. lxxviii. 61. 'He gave his strength into captivity, and his glory into the hand of his enemies.' Where he speaks of the surprisal of the ark by the Philistines, which when it was accomplished, Phineas's wife called her son Ichabod, and said, the 'glory is departed;' 1 Sam. iv. 21. The word which we have rendered 'a defence,' properly signifies 'a covering;' as was the mercy-seat the covering of the ark. So that 'upon the glory shall be a defence,' is as much as unto you, the 'mercy-seat shall be on the ark,' or you shall have the mercy represented and intimated thereby.

(2dly.) The tabernacle and cloud, or pillar of fire, are also called to mind; so the words are expressive of that figure of God's gracious presence with his people, which we have recounted, Exod. xl. 34. 'Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.' So it continued, the glory of God was in the tabernacle, and the cloud upon it, or over it; as the word here is; and so 'upon all the glory there was a defence.'

2dly. I need not stay to prove that all those things were typical of Christ. He was the end of the law, represented

by the ark, which did contain it; Rom. x. 3, 4. He was the mercy-seat, as he is called, and said to be, Rom. iii. 25. 1 John ii. 2. covering the law from the eye of justice, as to those that are interested in him. He was the tabernacle and temple wherein dwelt the glory of God, and which was recompensed with all pledges of his gracious presence.

Apply then this promise to gospel times, and the substance of it is comprehended in these two propositions:

I. The presence of Christ with any people, is the glory of any people.

This is the glory here spoken of, as is evident to any one that will but read over the second verse, and consider its influence unto these words. 'The branch of the Lord shall be to them beautiful and glorious, and upon all the glory shall be a defence.'

II. The presence of God in special providence over a people, attends the presence of Christ in grace with a people.

If Christ the glory be with them, a defence shall be upon them; what lies else in allusion to the mercy-seat, not drawn forth in these propositions, may be afterward insisted on.

I. For the first: What I pray else should be so? This is their glory, or they have none: Is it in their number, that they are great, many, and populous? God thinks not so, nor did he when he gave an account of the thoughts of his people of old. 'The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all people;' Deut. vii. 7. God made no reckoning of numbers; he chose that people that was fewest of all: he esteemed well of them, when they were but 'a few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers;' Psal. cv. 12. You know what it cost David in being seduced by Satan into the contrary opinion. He thought the glory of his people had been in their number, and caused them to be reckoned; but God taught him his error, by taking off with a dreadful judgment no small portion of the number he sought after. There is nothing more common in the Scripture, than for the Lord to speak contempt of the multitude of any people, as a thing of nought; and he takes pleasure to confound them by weak and despised means.

Is it in their wisdom and counsel, their understanding for the ordering of their affairs? Is that their glory? Why, see how God derides the prince of Tyrus, who was lifted up with an apprehension hereof; and counted himself as God, upon that account; Ezek. xxvii. 3—6, &c. The issue of all is, 'Thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slays thee;' God will let him see in his ruin and destruction, what a vain thing that was, which he thought his glory. Might I dwell upon it I could evince unto you these two things:

1. That whereas the end of all human wisdom in nations, or the rulers of them, is to preserve human society in peace and quietness, within the several bounds and allotments that are given unto them by the providence of God, it so comes to pass for the most part through the righteous judgment and wise disposal of God, that it hath a contrary end, and bringeth forth contrary effects throughout the world. Do not the inhabitants of the earth generally owe all their disturbance, sorrow, and blood to the wise contrivance of a few men, not knowing how to take the law of their proceedings from the mouth of God, but laying their deep counsels, and politic contrivances, in a subserviency to their lusts and ambition? And what glory is there in that which almost constantly brings forth contrary effects to its own proper end and intendment?

2. That God delights to mix a spirit of giddiness, error, and folly in the counsels of the wise men of the world; making them reel and stagger in their way like a drunken man, that they shall not know what to do, but commonly in their greatest concernments, fix upon things as devoid of true reason, and sound wisdom, as any children or fools could close withal. 'He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong;' Job v. 13, 14. so at large, Isa. xix. 11—14. and now where is their glory? I could give instances of both these, and that plentifully in the days and seasons that have passed over our own heads. The like also may be said of the strength, the power, the armies of any people; if their number and wisdom be vain, be no glory, their strength, which is but the result or exurgency of their number and wisdom, must needs be so also. But you have all this summed up together, Jer. ix.

23, 24. 'Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord.' It is neither wisdom, nor might, nor riches, that is our glory; but our interest in Jehovah only.

This I say is in the presence of Christ only.

Now Christ may be said to be present with a people two ways.

(1.) In respect of the dispensation of his gospel amongst them, the profession of it, and subjection to the ordinances thereof. The gospel of Christ is a blessed gospel, a glorious gospel, in itself, and unto them that embrace it. But yet this profession separated from the root from which it ought to spring, is not the glory of any people; Christ is not their glory, who are his shame. Empty profession is the shame of Christ in the world; and shall not be others' glory. The apostle tells us that this may consist with a litter of unclean lusts, making them in whom it is abominable to God and man; 2 Tim. iii. 4, &c. If the bare profession of the truth would render a nation glorious, oh, how glorious were this nation! So would have been the people of old, who cried, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.' But when men profess the truth of Christ, but in their hearts and ways maintain and manifest an enmity to the power of that truth, and to all of Christ that is in reality in the world, this is no glory.

(2.) Christ is present with a people in and by his Spirit, dwelling in their hearts by his Spirit and faith, uniting them to himself. I do not distinguish this from the former as inconsistent with it: for though the former may be without this, yet where this is, there will be the former also. Profession may be without union, but union will bring forth profession. There may be a form of godliness without power: but where the power is, there will be the appearance also. Now when Christ is thus present with a people, that is, they are united to him by his Spirit, they are members of his mystical body, that is their glory. Be they few or many in a nation that are so, they are the glory of that nation, and nothing else: and where there is the most of them,

there is the most glory: and where they are diminished, there the glory is eclipsed. Christ mystical, the head, and his body is all the glory that is in the world. If any nation be glorious and honourable above others, it is because of this presence of Christ in that nation. Christ is the glory of his saints, Isa. iv. 2. in him they glory, Isa. xlv. 25. and the saints are Christ's glory; 2 Cor. viii. 23. They are the glory of Christ, and he glories in them, as God of Job, to Satan: 'Seest thou my servant Job?' chap. i. 8. He doth as it were glory in him against the wickedness of the world; and Christ in them, and they in him, are all the glory of this world. So Zech. ii. 8. Christ was in the pursuit of the collection of his people from their dispersion: what seeks he after; what looks he for? he goes after the glory; even to find out them who are God's glory in the world.

Now this is the glory of any people upon a threefold account.

[1.] This alone makes them honourable and precious before God. So says God of them, Isa. xliii. 1. 'I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine;' those are they of whom I spake: what then? ver. 4. 'Thou art precious in my sight, thou art honourable, I have loved thee;' how doth God manifest his valuation of them? ver. 3. Why he will give all the world, the greatest, mightiest, wealthiest nations for them, ver. 5. all is as nothing in comparison of them, who are his portion, and the lot of his inheritance. The Lord keep this alive upon your hearts, that that may be in your eyes the glory of this nation, on the account whereof it is precious to God, and honourable in his sight.

[2.] Because this presence of Christ makes men comely and excellent in themselves, with what eye soever the world may look upon them. The whole world out of Christ lies in evil, under the curse of God, and defilement of sin: in all the glittering shows of their wealth and riches, in the state and magnificence of their governments, the beauty of their laws and order (as they relate to their persons) they are in the eye of God a filthy and an abominable thing, a thing that his soul loatheth. Curse and sin will make any thing to be so: but now Christ is to them and in them beautiful

and glorious; Isa. iv. 2. Christ is so in himself, and he is so unto them, and makes them to be so. There is through him beauty, and excellency, and comeliness, every thing that may make them lovely and acceptable. That the world looks not on them as such, is not their fault, but the world's misery: it looked on their master Christ himself, the brightness of his Father's glory, who is altogether lovely, the chiefest of ten thousand, with no other eye; Isa. liii. 2. They are so in themselves, and are so to Christ; being exposed indeed to many temptations, oftentimes they are made black and sully by them: but yet they are comely still; Cant. i. 5. The ways whereby they are made black, for the most part we have expressed, ver. 6. when the sun shines on them, and they are made keepers of the vineyard, it comes upon them. Prosperity and public employment oftentimes so sully them, that they are made black to the reproach of the world: but yet to Christ who forgives, and washes them, they are comely. Yea, this is all the excellency that is in the world. Sin with honour, with wealth, with power, with wisdom, is a deformed and contemptible thing: it is grace only that is beautiful and glorious: it is the gracious only that are excellent in the earth; Psal. xvi. 3.

[3.] This alone makes any truly useful unto others; and that either for preservation or prosperity.

1st. Here lies the preservation of any nation from ruin. Isa. lxv. 8, 9. 'Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.' This is the blessing in the cluster, the hidden and secret blessing, for the sake whereof, the whole is not destroyed. The remnant left by the Lord of hosts, Isa. i. 9. that keeps the whole from being as Sodom or Gomorrah. If Elisha, a servant of the Lord, told the king of Israel in his distress, that if he had not regarded the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, he would not so much as have spoken to him; how much more will the Lord himself let a people know in their distress, that were it not for the regard he hath to his secret ones, he would not take the least notice, as to relief, of them or their concernments? Sodom could not be destroyed until Lot was deli-

vered. The whole world owes its preservation and being to them, whom they make it their business to root out of it: they are as the foolish woman, that pulls down her own house with both her hands. It is not your counsels, you know how they have been divided, entangled, insnared; it is not your armies, as such; what have they been to oppose against the mighty floods that have risen up in this nation? and they also have been as a reed driven to and fro with the wind (mankind is no better; John the Baptist says it of himself); but it is this presence of Christ in and with his, that hath been the preservation of England, in the midst of all the changes and revolutions that we have been exercised withal; Micah v. 5.

2dly. Not only preservation, but prosperity is from hence also: Micah v. 7. 'And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, that waits not for the sons of men.' It is the remnant of Jacob of whom he speaks, that is, this people of Christ, with whom he is so present as hath been manifested; and where are they? They are in the midst of many people, in their inside, in their bowels; they are woven by their relations and employments into the bowels of the nations; and on that account there is neither this nor any nation about us, but shall spin out their mercies or their misery from their own bowels; their providential fates lie in them; as is their deportment towards this remnant, such will their issue be. But what shall this remnant do? Why it shall be 'as dew from the Lord,' and as 'showers on the grass.' It shall be that alone which makes them fruitful, flourishing, and prosperous; it may be it will be so, provided there be good assistance, counsel, and strength, to carry on their affairs: yea, blessed be God for counsels and for armies; he hath made them useful to us: but the truth is, the blessing of this dew depends not on them, it tarrieth not for man, it waiteth not for the sons of men: it will be a blessing, let men do what they will it depends not on their uncertain and unstable counsel, on their weak and feeble strength. This remnant is as the ark in the house of Obed-edom, as Joseph in the house of Potiphar, all is blessed and prospered for their sakes. It is not the glorious battlements, the painted windows, the

crouching antics that support a building, but the stones that lie unseen in or upon the earth. It is often those who are despised and trampled on, that bear up the weight of a whole nation. All the fresh springs of our blessings are in Zion.

It were easy to manifest that in all our late revolutions we have turned on this hinge. According as the presence of Christ with his people, in the power of his Spirit, hath received entertainment in these nations, so hath our state and condition been. For many years before the beginning of these troubles the land had been full of oppression, I mean, in respect to the people of God. Poverty, imprisonment, dangers, banishment, reproaches were their portion. God was long patient; at length the height of their adversaries came to this, that they set not themselves so much against their persons or ways, as against the Spirit of Christ in and with them: that was made their reproach, that the by-word wherewith they were despised in the mouths of their adversaries, and the profane multitude: when things were come to this, that the very presence of Christ with his people was made the direct object of the hatred of men, the Lord could bear it no longer; but sware by himself, that time should be given them no more: in this very house he raised up saviours and deliverers on mount Zion to judge the mount of Edom; and how did he carry on this work? 'Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts,' as Zech. iv. 6. even by that very Spirit which had been reviled and despised. Give me leave to say, the work of judging this nation was carried on by the presence of the Spirit of Christ with his in faith and prayer: it was not by prudence of counsels, or strength of armies above that of our enemies, that we prevailed, but by faith and prayer; and if any one be otherwise minded, I leave him for his resolution to the judgment of the great day, when all transactions shall be called over again. The adversaries themselves I am sure acknowledged it, when they openly professed, that there was nothing left for them to overcome, or to overcome them, but the prayers of the fanatic crew.

After some years' contending, when the Lord had begun to give us deliverance by breaking the power of the enemy, at least in this nation, besides those bitter divisions that fell

out among the people of God themselves, and the backsliding of some, to the cause and principles they had opposed, this evil was also found rising again amongst us; slighting, blaspheming, contemning under several pretences, of the Spirit and presence of Christ in and with his saints: you know what ensued; what shakings, what revolutions, with new wars, bloodshed, and desolation, over the three nations. And give me leave to remember you as one that had opportunity to make observations of the passages of providence in those days, in all the three nations, in the times of our greatest hazards; give me leave, I say, to remember you, that the public declarations of those employed in the affairs of this nation, in the face of the enemies, their addresses unto God among themselves, their prayers night and day, their private discourses one with another, were, that the preservation of the interest of Christ in and with his people was the great thing that lay in their eyes; and that if it were not so, they desired that God would stop them in their way, yea, rather cause their carcases to fall in the high places of the field, than to prosper them in that which should be contrary thereunto: and we know what ensued. How we have used our mercies is another matter: this was the principle that prevailed with God and man.

Use 1. If you desire the glory of these nations, labour to promote the interest of Christ in these nations. I am not speaking unto you about disputable things, differences among the people of God themselves, nor am I interposing my advice in your civil affairs, but I speak in general about those with whom Christ is present, by his Spirit, his chosen ones, against whom there is an old enmity in Satan and the world. The glory of these nations is, that there is a people in them, that have Christ in the midst of them; let it be your business to take care for that glory. But how shall we do it?

(1.) Labour personally, every one of you, to get Christ in your own hearts. I am very far from thinking that a man may not be lawfully called to magistracy, if he be not a believer; or that being called, he should be impeded in the execution of his trust and place, because he is not so; I shall not suspend my obedience whilst I inquire after my lawful governor's conversion; but yet this I say, considering

that I cannot much value any good, but what comes in by the way of promise, I confess I can have no great expectation from them whom God loves not, delights not in; if any be otherwise minded, I shall not contend with him; but for this I will contend with all the world, that it is your duty to labour to assure Christ in your own hearts, even that you may be the better fitted for the work of God in the world. It is the promise of God to Zion, that her 'officers shall be peace, and her exactors righteousness,' Isa. lx. 17. and then shall she call her 'walls salvation, and her gates praise;' ver. 18. It will be little advantage to any, to have the work of God raised in the world, and not to have the foundation-stone laid in their hearts. If there should be in any of you an enmity unto Christ and the power of godliness, a hatred and contempt of the people of God, an evil heart of unbelief, an evil course of life, worldliness, oppression, vanity of mind, &c. would it advantage you to be intrusted with power in these nations? Would it not hasten your destruction, and increase your account? It is a noble promise that we have, Isa. xxxii. 17. 'And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.' It is a gospel righteousness that is spoken of; and that not of the cause as such only, but of the persons; the persons being righteous, and that with the righteousness of Christ, the effects mentioned shall follow their righteous undertakings; we have peace now, outward peace; but alas, we have not quietness, and if any thing may be done that may give us quietness, yet perhaps we may not have assurance; we may be quickly shaken again; but when the righteousness of the persons and cause meet, all the rest will follow.

(2.) Set yourselves to oppose that overflowing flood of profaneness, and opposition to the power of godliness, that is spreading itself over this nation. Know you not that the nation begins to be overwhelmed by the pourings out of a profane, wicked, carnal spirit, full of rage and contempt of all the work of reformation that has been attempted amongst us? Do you not know that if the former profane principle should prove predominant in this nation, that it will quickly return to its former station and condition, and that with the price of your dearest blood? A d yet is there not already

such a visible prevalency of it, that in many places, the very profession of religion is become a scorn; and in others, those old forms and ways taken up with greediness, which are a badge of apostacy from all former engagements and actings? And are not these sad evidences of the Lord's departing from us? If I should lay before you a comparison between the degrees of the appearances of the glory of God in this nation, the steps whereby it came forth, and those whereby it seems almost to be departing, it would be a matter of admiration and lamentation; I pray God we lose not our ground faster than we won it. Were our hearts kept up to our good old principles on which we first engaged, it would not be so with us; but innumerable evils have laid hold upon us; and the temptations of these days have made us a woful prey; gray hairs are here and there, and it will be no wonder if our ruin should come with more speed, than did our deliverance. O then set yourselves in the gap; by all ways and means oppose the growth of an evil, profane, common, malignant spirit amongst us. But I haste.

(3.) Value, encourage, and close with them, in and with whom is this presence of Christ. They are the glory of the nation; its peace, safety, and prosperity will be found wrapped up in them. I know there lie divers considerable objections against the practice of this duty; I shall name some few of them, and leave the exhortation unto your considerations.

[1.] Who are those persons in whom is this presence of Christ? Are they such as profess indeed religion, but neglect all rules of righteousness; that would be accounted godly, but care not to be honest? The marks of whose miscarriages are written on their foreheads; are not these so far from being the glory that they are the shame of any nation? I pray give me leave to endeavour the rolling away of this great stone of offence, in these few ensuing considerations.

1st. Then, I shall willingly lay this down for a principle, that he is not religious, who is not also righteous; as also I shall not much value his righteousness, who is not religious. He that is righteous doth righteousness; he doth so, in the bent of his spirit and course of his ways and walkings. If a man be froward, heady, high-minded, sensual, unjust, oppressive, worldly, self-seeking, a hater of good men, false,

treacherous, let him pretend to what he will, that man's religion is in vain; he may have a form of godliness, but he hath not the power of it. This principle we shall agree upon.

2dly. There have been in the days wherein we live, many false professors, hypocrites, that have thought gain to be godliness, by reason of whose wicked lives, ways, and walking, the name of God hath been evil spoken of; and woe to them by whom these offences are come; but yet also woe to the world because of offences; if these offences turn off men from an esteem of the remnant of Christ in whom is his presence, woe to them also. I acknowledge these days have abounded with offences; but woe to them who are turned aside by them from owning the portion and inheritance of Christ.

3dly. It cannot be denied, but that many of them who do belong unto Christ, have wofully miscarried in these days. 'O tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon;' oh that our souls could mourn in secret on that account, that we could go backward, and cover the nakedness and folly of one another; but alas, this hath been far from being our frame of spirit; we have every one spread the failings of his brother, before the face of men and devils; but yet notwithstanding these miscarriages, those that are the people of Christ, are his people still; and he loves them still, whether we will or no; and commonly those who are least able to bear with the miscarriages of others, have most of their own.

4thly. That differences of judgments in civil affairs, or church matters, ought not presently to be made arguments of men not being righteous. Some men think that none are righteous that are not of their principles, than which principle there is nothing more unrighteous. Let men that differ from them walk never so holily, profess never so strictly; yet, if they are not of their mind, they are not righteous. If men are offended on such accounts, it is because they will be so.

5thly. This hath ever been the way of the men of the world; that when any have been unblamable and zealous upon the account of religion, they will attempt their reputation, though without any ground or colour, upon the account

of righteousness. So suffered the Christians of old; and so the Puritans of former days, unjustly and falsely, as God will judge and declare. The world then in this matter is not to be believed; the common reports of it are from the devil, the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them in the same manner before God night and day. These are but pretences, whereby men ignorant of the mystery of the gospel, and the power of grace harden themselves to their ruin.

6thly. This remnant of Christ with whom his presence is, who are the glory of a nation, is to be found only amongst the professors of a nation. For,

[1.] Although, of those who are professors, there may be many bad, yet of those that are not professors, there is not one good. Where there is faith there will be a profession. If I should not know well where to find them, I am sure I know where I cannot find them; I cannot find them in the ways of the world, and conformity to it; in darkness, ignorance, neglect of duty, and utter unacquaintedness with gospel truths, the gifts and graces of the Spirit; there I cannot find them; I shall not say of them, 'Behold the Lord's anointed,' let their outward worldly appearance be what it will. Now by the help of these considerations, those who have in themselves principles of life and light in Christ, will or may be, setting aside their temptations, enabled to discover this generation of the Lord's delight; and for others, I cannot take down the enmity that God hath set up. So then, notwithstanding this objection, I shall certainly esteem this remnant of Christ to lie among those, who having received gospel light, and gospel gifts evidently, do make also profession of gospel grace, union and communion with Christ, separation from the world, and the ways of it, in a conversation acceptable unto God in Christ; and to this portion shall I say as Ruth to Naomi, let what will be glorious, or uppermost in the world, 'Whither thou goest, I will go; where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. The Lord do so to me and more also, if ought part thee and me:' with them let my portion be, and the portion of my family, whatever their lot and condition in this world should be; and the Lord say, Amen.

[2.] But it will be said secondly, We are still at a loss; for what woful divisions are there amongst this generation

of professors? Some are for one way, and some for another; some say one sort are the people of God, some another; some say the Prelatists are so, some the Presbyterians, some the Independents, some the Anabaptists, some the Fifth Monarchy-men, some others; and on whom should the valuation pleaded for be cast?

To this I answer,

1st. Some do say so, and plead thus, it cannot be denied; but the truth is, the greater is their weakness and folly. It is impossible men acquainted with the Spirit of Christ and the gospel, should say so, unless they were under the power of one temptation or other. But it is no party, but the party of Christ in the world, and against the world, the seed of the woman, against the seed of the serpent that I am pleading for; that men as to their interest in Christ should be judged from such denominations, as though they make a great noise in the world, yet indeed signify very little things in themselves, is most unrighteous, and unequal; nor will men find peace in such rash and precipitate judgments.

2dly. There may be many divisions amongst the people of God, and yet none of them be divided from Christ the head. The branches of a tree may be entangled by strong winds, and stricken against one another, and yet none of them be broken off from the tree itself; and when the storm is over every one possesses its own place in quietness, beauty, and fruitfulness. Whilst the strong winds of temptations are upon the followers of Christ, they may be tossed and entangled; but not being broken off from the root, when he shall say to the winds, 'Peace, be still,' they will flourish again in peace and beauty.

3dly. Let not Satan cheat you of your duty, by this trivial objection. If he can keep you from duty, whilst he can make divisions; he hath you sure enough. They of whom I speak, be they under what reproach or obloquies soever, they are all true men, all the children of one father, though they are unhappily fallen out by the way.

Use 2. Of encouragement to those that have the presence of Christ with them in the manner declared; they shall be safe; in vain it is for all the world to attempt their security; either they shall not prevail, or they shall mischief themselves by their own prevalency; Micah v. 8. As they shall be a

dew where they are appointed for a blessing, so as a lion where they are oppressed. Destruction will come forth on their account, and that terribly like the destruction of a lion, speedily in passing through it shall be done. And whence is it that this feeble generation shall be as a lion? It is from the presence of Christ among them, who is the lion of the tribe of Judah, and to honour them, he assigns that to them, which is his own proper work; let men take heed how they provoke this lion; for the present, Gen. xlix. 9. he is 'gone up from the prey, he stoopeth down, he coucheth as a lion, and as an old lion, who shall rouse him up?' He hath taken his prey in these nations, in the destruction of many of his enemies; he seemeth now to take his rest, to couch down, his indignation being overpast, but who shall rouse him up? Why what if he be provoked? what if he be stirred up? why he will not lie down, 'until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain;' Num. xxiii. 24. There is no delivery from him; no, but what if there be a strong combination of many against him, will he not cease and give over? Isa. xxxi. 4. Be they who they will, the shepherds of the people, be they never so many, a multitude of them, let them lift up their voice and rage never so much, all is one, he will perform his work and accomplish it; until you have him in the condition mentioned, Isa. lxiii. 1—6. Blessed are the people that are under his care and conduct, yea, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.

SERMON XV.*

HOW WE MAY BRING OUR HEARTS TO BEAR REPROOFS.

Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.—Psalm cxli. 5.

It is generally agreed by expositors, that this psalm, as that foregoing, with two of those that follow, were composed by David, in the time of his banishment, or flight from the court of Saul. The state wherein he describeth himself to have been, the matter of his pleas and prayers contained in them, with sundry express circumstances regarding that season and his condition therein, do manifest that to have been the time of their composure.

That the psalmist was now in some distress, whereof he was deeply sensible, is evident from that vehemency of his spirit, which he expresseth in the reiteration of his request, or supplication, ver. 1. And by his desire, 'that his prayer might come before the Lord as incense; and the lifting up of his hands as the evening sacrifice;' ver. 2. The Jewish expositors guess not improbably, that in that allusion he had regard unto his present exclusion from the holy services of the tabernacle, which in other places he deeply complains of.

For the matter of his prayer in this beginning of the psalm (for I shall not look beyond the text) it respecteth himself, and his deportment under his present condition, which he desireth may be harmless and holy, becoming himself and useful unto others. And whereas he was two ways liable to miscarry; first, by too high an exasperation of spirit against his oppressors and persecutors; and, secondly, by a fraudulent and pusillanimous compliance with them in their wicked courses (which are the two extremes that men are apt sinfully to run into in such conditions), he prays earnestly to be delivered from them both. The first he hath

* This sermon was printed in the Supplement to the Morning Exercise, at Cripplegate.

respect unto; ver. 3. 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips:' namely, that he might not, under those great provocations which were given him, break forth into an unseemly intemperance of speech against his unjust oppressors, which sometimes fierce and unreasonable cruelties will wrest from very sedate and moderate spirits. But it was the desire of this holy psalmist, as in like cases it should be ours, that his heart might be always preserved in such a frame, under the conduct of the Spirit of God, as not to be surprised into an expression of distempered passion, in any of his words or sayings. The other he regards in his earnest supplication, to be delivered from it; ver. 4. 'Incline not my heart unto any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties.' There are two parts of his request unto the purpose intended. First, That by the power of God's grace influencing his mind and soul, his heart might not be inclined unto any communion or society with his wicked adversaries in their wickedness. Secondly, That he might be preserved from a liking of, or a longing after, those things, which are the baits and allurements, whereby men are apt to be drawn into societies and conspiracies with the workers of iniquity; 'And let me not eat of their dainties.' See Prov. i. 10—14. For he here describeth the condition of men, prospering for a season in a course of wickedness; they first jointly give up themselves unto the practice of iniquity, and then together solace themselves in those satisfactions of their lusts, which their power and interest in the world do furnish them withal. These are the 'dainties,' of which an impotent longing and desire do betray the minds of unstable persons unto a compliance with ways of sin and folly: for I look on these 'dainties' to comprise whatever 'the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh,' or 'the pride of life' can afford. All these David prays to be delivered from any inclination unto; especially when they are made the allurements of a course of sin. In the enjoyment of these dainties it is the common practice of wicked men to sooth up, approve of, and mutually encourage one another in the way and course wherein they are engaged. And this completes that goodly felicity which in this world so many aspire unto, and whereof alone they are capable. The whole of it is but a society in perishing sensual enjoy-

ments, without control, and with mutual applauses from one another.

This the psalmist had a special regard unto; who casting his eye towards another communion and society which he longed after, ver. 5. that in the first place presents itself unto him, which is most opposite unto those mutual applauses and rejoicings in one another, which is the salt and cement of all evil societies; namely, rebukes and reproofs for the least miscarriages that shall be observed. Now whereas the dainties which some enjoy in a course of prosperous wickedness, are that alone which seems to have any thing in it amongst them that is desirable; and on the other side rebukes and reproofs are those alone which seem to have any sharpness, or matter of uneasiness and dislike, in the society of the godly, David balanceth that which seemeth to be sharpest in the one society, against that which seems to be sweetest in the other, and without respect unto other advantages, prefers the one above the other. Hence some read the beginning of the words, 'Let the righteous rather smite me,' with respect unto this comparison and balance.

'Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer shall be in their calamity.' The view of our translation will evidence the words to be elliptical in the original, by the various supplements which we make to fill up the sense of them, and render them coherent. And this hath put some difficulty on the interpretation of the text, and caused some variety of apprehensions in sober and learned expositors.

It is not unto my present purpose to engage into a discussion of all the difficulties of the text, seeing I design to found no other doctrine thereon, than what all will acknowledge to be contained in the words and their coherence. I shall only therefore briefly open them, with respect unto our present purpose, and its concernment in them.

יהלמני צדיק חסד: צדיק, 'the righteous,' is any one opposed to the workers of iniquity, ver. 4. any righteous person whatever, any one who is of the society and communion of the righteous ones: for all the world falls under this distribution, as it will one day appear. 'Let him smite me:' the word הלם is seldom used in the Scripture, but to signify, 'a

severe stroke,' which shakes the subject smitten, and causeth it to tremble. See Prov. xxiii. 25. 1 Sam. xiv. 6. Psal. lxxiv. 6. And it is used for 'the stroke of the hammer on the anvil,' in fashioning of the iron; Isa. xli. 7. Wherefore the word חסד following may be taken adverbially as a lenitive of that severity which this word importeth. 'Let him smite me,' but 'leniter, benigne, misericorditer,' 'gently, kindly, friendly, mercifully.' And so some translations read the words: 'Let the righteous smite me friendly, or kindly.' But there is no need to wrest the word to such an unusual sense; for the psalmist intends to shew, that so he may be delivered from the society of ungodly men, and enjoy the communion of the righteous, he would not deprecate the greatest severities, which, according to rule, might be exercised in rebuking, or reproving of him. And this he doth with so full a satisfaction of mind, with such a high valuation of the advantage he should have thereby, that he says not he would bear it patiently and quietly, but חסד, it will be unto me 'a benignity, a mercy, a kindness,' as the word imports. And as it seems that some reproofs at least, some regular dealings of righteous persons with us, may come as a stroke that makes us shake and tremble; so it is a good advance in spiritual wisdom, to find out kindness and mercy in those that are so grievous unto our natural spirits, unto flesh and blood.

ויוכיחני, 'And let him reprove me.' This manifests what he intends by smiting in the foregoing words. It is reproofs that he intends; and these he calls smiting in opposition unto the flattering compliance of wicked men with one another in the enjoyment of their dainties, and with respect unto that smart unto the mind and affections, wherewith some of them are sometimes accompanied. But this word directly expressing that subject matter whereof I intend to treat, must be again spoken unto.

שמן ראש אל־יני ראשי: These words have a double interpretation; for they may be either deprecatory of an evil implied, or declaratory of the psalmist's sense of the good he desired. Kimchi on the place observes, that his father Joseph divided the words of the text, and began here a new sense, wherein the psalmist returns unto the close of the fourth verse: 'Let me not eat of their dainties,' and 'let not their precious oil,' that is, their flatteries and soothings in

sin, 'break my head;' but let the reproofs of the righteous preserve me. And this sense is followed by the vulgar Latin: 'Oleum autem peccatorum non impingat caput meum.' But the other construction and sense of the words is more natural: שמן ראש, 'Oleum capitis,' the 'oil of the head,' we render an 'excellent oil;' and countenance may be given unto that interpretation from Exod. xxx. 23. where בשמים ראש, 'Spices of the head,' is well rendered, 'principal spices.' But I rather think that שמן עלראש, 'Oil poured on the head,' which was the manner of all solemn unctions, is intended. This being a great privilege, and the token of communication of great mercy, the psalmist compares the rebukes of the righteous thereunto; and therefore he adds, אל־יני ראשי, 'it shall not break my head.' Considering reproofs in their own nature, he calls them 'smitings;' some of them being very sharp, as it is needful they should be, where we are obliged to rebuke ἀποτόμως, 'in a piercing and cutting manner;' 2 Cor. xiii. 10. Tit. i. 13. But with respect unto their use, benefit, and advantage, they are like unto that anointing oil, which being poured on the head, was both gentle and pleasant, and a pledge of the communication of spiritual privileges, whence no inconveniences would ensue.

The last clause of the words belonging not unto our present design, I shall not insist on their explication.

Some few things must be farther premised unto our principal intention concerning the nature of those reproofs, which are proposed as a matter of such advantage in the text. And,

1. The word יכח here used, signifieth, 'to argue, to dispute, to contend in judgment,' as well as 'to reprove, rebuke, or reprehend.' Its first signification is 'to argue,' or 'to plead a cause with arguments.' Hence it is used as a common term between God and man, denoting the reasons real, or pretended only, on the one side, and the other. So God himself speaks unto his people לכו נא ונוכחה, Isa. i. 18. 'Go to now and let us plead,' reason, or argue 'together.' And Job calls his pleas or argument in prayer unto God תוכחות, chap. xxiii. 4. 'I would fill my mouth with arguments.' Wherefore, that only hath the true nature of a reproof, which is accompanied with reasons and arguments for the evincing of what it tends unto. Rash, groundless, wrathful, precipitate censures

and rebukes are evil in themselves, and in our present case, of no consideration. Nor indeed ought any one to engage in the management of reproofs, who is not furnished with rule and argument to evince their necessity, and render them effectual. Sometimes things may be so circumstanced, as that a reproof shall so carry its own reason and efficacious conviction along with it, that there will be no need of arguing, or pleas to make it useful. So the look of our blessed Saviour on Peter, under the circumstances of his case, was a sufficient reproof, though he spake not one word in its confirmation. But ordinarily cogent reasons are the best conveyances of reproofs to the minds of men, be they of what sort they will.

2. Reproofs do always respect a fault, an evil, a miscarriage, or a sin in them that are reproved. There may be mutual admonitions, and exhortations among Christians, with respect unto sundry things in the course of their faith and obedience, without a regard unto any evil or miscarriage. The general nature of a reproof is an admonition, or exhortation, but it hath its special nature from its regard unto a fault in course, or particular fact. And hence the word signifies also 'to chastise,' wherein is a correction for, and the means of a recovery from, a miscarriage. 2 Sam. vii. 14. 'I will reprove him by the rod of men:' that is, chastise him. This therefore is that reproof which we intend, a warning, admonition, or exhortation given unto any, whereby they are rebuked for, and with respect unto, some moral evil or sin in their course, way, practice, or any particular miscarriage, such as may render them obnoxious unto divine displeasure, or chastisement: for it is essential unto a regular reproof, that in him who gives it, it may be accompanied with, or do proceed from, an apprehension, that the person reproved is by the matter of the reproof rendered obnoxious unto the displeasure of God.

3. It may also be considered, that reproving is not left arbitrarily unto the wills of men. Whatever seems to be so, it loseth its nature, if it be not a duty in him who reproves, and will come short of its efficacy. No wise man will reprove, but when it is his duty so to do, unless he design the just reproach of a busy body for his reward. The command is general with respect unto brother and neighbour, Lev. xix. 17. 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart;

thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.' But as to the particular discharge of this work as a duty, there must be either an especial office, or an especial relation, or a concurrence of circumstances for its warranty. God hath in his wisdom and care given rules and bounds unto our engagement unto duties; without a regulation whereby we shall wander in them with endless dissatisfactions unto ourselves, and unnecessary provocations unto others. But the duty of reproving with the love, wisdom, tenderness, and compassion required in the discharge of it; its motives, ends, and circumstances; its proper rules and limitations fall not under my present consideration: but these things in general were necessary to be premised unto what do so.

That which the text instructs us in may be comprised in this general observation.

Observation. Reproofs, though accompanied with some sharpness, if rightly received and duly improved, are a mercy and advantage, incomparably above all the satisfactions, which a joint consent with others in sin and pleasures can afford.

The latter part of the proposition I have mentioned only to express the balance that is proposed by the psalmist between the best and most desirable advantages of wicked society on the one hand, and the sharpest or most displeasing severities that accompany the communion of the righteous, or godly. But I shall not at all handle the comparison, as designing only some directions how men should behave themselves under reproofs, that they may be a kindness, and an excellent oil unto them; or how they may by them obtain spiritual benefit and advantage unto their own souls. And this, however at present the matter may be managed, is of itself of great importance. For as in the state of weakness and imperfection, of mistakes and miscarriages, wherein we are, there is no outward help or aid of more use and advantage unto us, than seasonable reproofs; so in the right receiving and improving of them, as high a trial of the spirits of men, as to their interest in wisdom and folly, doth consist, as in any thing that doth befall them, or wherewith they may be exercised. For as scorners of reproofs, those that hear them unwillingly, that bear them haughtily and

impatiently, with designs of revenge, or disdainful retortions, having the characters of pride and folly indelibly fixed on them by the Holy Ghost; so their due admission and improvement is in the same infallible truth represented as an evident pledge of wisdom, and an effectual means of its increase. This is so much, and so frequently insisted on, in that great treasure of all wisdom, spiritual, natural and political, namely, the Book of Proverbs, that it is altogether needless to call over any particular testimonies unto that purpose.

Three things we are to inquire into, in compliance with our present design.

I. How reproofs may be duly received.

II. The reasons why they ought so to be.

III. How they may be duly improved.

I. That we may receive reproofs in a due manner, three things are to be considered: 1. The general qualification of the reprover; 2. The nature of the reproof; 3. The matter of it.

1. The psalmist here desires that his reprover may be a righteous man: 'Let the righteous smite me,' let him reprove me. To give and take reproofs is a dictate of the law of nature, whereby every man is obliged to seek the good of others, and to promote it according to their ability and opportunity. The former is directed by that love, which is due unto others; the latter, by that which is due unto ourselves: which two are the great rules, and give measure to the duties of all societies, whether civil or spiritual. Wherefore it doth not evacuate a reproof, or discharge him who is reproved, from the duty of attending unto it, that he by whom it is managed, is not righteous, yea is openly wicked: for the duty itself being an effect of the law of nature, it is the same, for the substance of it, by whomsoever it is performed. Yea ofttimes such moral, or rather immoral qualifications as render not only the reprover less considerable, but also the reproof itself, until thoroughly weighed and examined, obnoxious unto prejudicate conceptions, do occasion a greater and more signal exercise of grace and wisdom in him that is reproved, than would have been stirred up, had all things concurred unto the exact regularity of the reproof. However it is desirable on many accounts, that he who reproves us be himself a righteous person, and be of us es-

teemed so to be. For as such a one alone will or can have a due sense of the evil reproved, with a right principle and end in the discharge of his own duty; so the minds of them that are reproved are by their sense of his integrity excluded from those insinuations of evasions, which prejudices and suggestions of just causes of reflections on their reprover will offer unto them; especially without the exercise of singular wisdom and humility will all the advantages of a just reproof be lost, where the allowed practice of greater sins and evils than that reproved is daily chargeable on the reprover. Hence is that reflection of our Saviour on the useless, hypocritical diligence of men, in 'pulling the mote out of their brother's eyes,' whilst they have beams in their own; Matt. vii. 3—5. The rule in this case is, if the reprover be a righteous person, consider the reprover first, and then the reproof; if he be otherwise, consider the reproof, and the reprover not at all.

2. The nature of a reproof is also to be considered. And this is threefold: for every reproof is either (1.) Authoritative, or (2.) Fraternal, or (3.) merely friendly and occasional.

(1.) Authoritative reproofs are either [1.] Ministerial, or [2.] Parental, or [3.] Despotical.

[1.] There is an especial authority accompanying ministerial reproofs, which we ought especially to consider and improve. Now I understand not hereby those doctrinal reproofs, when in the dispensation of that word of grace and truth, which is 'profitable for correction and reproof,' 2 Tim. iii. 16. they speak, and exhort, and 'rebuke' the sins of men 'with all authority;' Tit. ii. 15. but the occasional application of the word unto individual persons upon their unanswerableness in any thing unto the truth, wherein they have been instructed. For every right reproof is but the orderly application of a rule of truth unto any person under his miscarriage, for his healing and recovery. Where therefore a minister of the gospel in the preaching of the word doth declare and teach the rule of holy obedience with ministerial authority, if any of the flock committed to his charge shall appear in any thing to walk contrary thereunto, or to have transgressed it in any offensive instance, as it is his duty, the discharge whereof will be required of him at the great day, particularly to apply the truth unto them in

the way of private, personal reproof; so he is still therein accompanied with his ministerial authority, which makes his reproof to be of a peculiar nature, and as such to be accounted for. For as he is thus commanded, as a minister, to 'exhort, rebuke, admonish,' and 'reprove' every one of his charge, as occasion shall require; so, in doing of it, he doth discharge and exercise his ministerial office and power. And he that is wise will forego no considerations that may give efficacy unto a just and due reproof; especially not such a one, as if it be neglected, will not only be an aggravation of the evil, for which he is reproved, but will also accumulate his guilt with a contempt of the authority of Jesus Christ. Wherefore the rule here is: The more clear and evident the representation of the authority of Christ is in the reproof, the more diligent ought we to be in our attendance unto it, and compliance with it. He is the great reprover of his church; Rev. iii. 19. All the use, power, authority, and efficacy of ecclesiastical reproofs, flow originally, and are derived from him. In ministerial reproofs there is the most express and immediate application of his authority made unto the minds of men; which if it be carelessly slighted, or proudly despised, or evacuated by perverse cavillings, as is the manner of some in such cases, it is an open evidence of a heart that never yet sincerely took upon this law and yoke.

These things are spoken of the personal reproofs that are given by ministers, principally unto those of their respective flocks, as occasion doth require; wherein I shall pray, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, would yet make us all more faithful and diligent, as the season wherein we live doth abundantly require it. But moreover church censures in admonition and excommunication have the nature and ends of ministerial reproofs. But the handling of their nature and use, with the duties of those persons who justly fall under them, and the benefit which they may reap thereby, is too long and large a subject to be here diverted unto.

[2.] Authoritative reproof is parental. Reproof is indeed one of the greatest and most principal duties of parents towards children, and without which all others for the most part do but pamper them unto slaughter and ruin. Neglect

hereof is that which hath filled us with so many Hophnies, Phinehases, and Absaloms; whose outrageous wickednesses are directly charged on the sinful lenity, and neglect in this matter, even of godly parents. And indeed whereas some parents are openly vicious and debauched even in the sight of their children, in a sensual neglect and contempt of the light of nature, whereby they lose all their authority in reproving, as well as all care about it; and whereas the most have so little regard unto sin as sin, whilst things are tolerably well in outward concerns, that they neglect the reproof of it as such; and many, through a foolish, contemptible prevalency of fond affection, will take no notice of the sinful follies, extravagancies, and miscarriages of their children, until all things grow desperate with them; but sooth up and applaud them in such effects of pride, vanity, and wantonness, as ought to be most severely reproved in them; the woful and dreadful degeneracy of the age wherein we live, owes itself much unto the horrible neglect of parents in this duty. That parental reproof is a duty taught by the law of nature, confirmed in the Scripture, enjoined under severe threatenings and penalties, exemplified in instances of blessings and vengeance, on its performance or neglect; rendered indispensably necessary by that depravation of our natures, which works in children from the womb, and grows up in strength and efficacy together with them, I should not need to prove, if it lay directly before me, it being a matter of universal acknowledgment. I shall only say, that whereas there is on many accounts an immediate impress of divine authority on parental reproofs, that which children ought to consider and know for themselves is, that a continuance in the neglect, or contempt of them, is a token that seldom fails of approaching temporal and eternal destruction; Prov. xxx. 17.

[3.] Authoritative reproof is despotical; namely, that of governors, rulers, and masters of families. This also partakes of the nature of those foregoing, and being a duty founded in the law of nature, as well as enforced by positive divine commands, casts a peculiar obligation to obedience on them that are so reproved. And where servants regard not sober and Christian reproofs, as the ordinance of God for their good, they lose the advantages of their condition,

and may be looked upon as unsanctified sufferers in a state of bondage, which hath an especial character of the first curse upon it.

(2.) Reproof is fraternal, or such as is mutual between the members of the same church, by virtue of that especial relation wherein they stand, and the obligation thence arising unto mutual watchfulness over each other, with admonitions, exhortations, and reproofs. As this is peculiarly appointed by our Saviour, Matt. xviii. 15. in confirmation of the ordinance in the church of the Jews to that purpose, Levit. xix. 17. and confirmed by many precepts and directions in the New Testament, Rom. xv. 18. 1 Thess. v. 14. Heb. iii. 12, 13. xii. 15, 16. so the neglect of it is that, which hath lost us not only the benefit, but also the very nature of church societies. Wherefore our improvement of rebukes in this kind, depends much on a due consideration of that duty and love, from whence they do proceed: for this we are by the royal law of charity obliged unto the belief of, where there is not open evidence unto the contrary. And whereas it may be those things, for which we may be thus reproved, are not of the greatest importance in themselves, who that is wise will by the neglect of the reproof itself, contract the open guilt of contemning the wisdom, love, and care of Christ in the institution of this ordinance?

(3.) Lastly, Reproofs are friendly or occasional, such as may be administered and managed by any persons, as reasons and opportunities require, from the common principle of universal love unto mankind, especially towards them that are of the household of faith. These also having in them the entire nature of reproofs, will fall under all the ensuing directions, which have a general respect thereunto.

If then we would duly make use of, and improve unto our advantage, the reproofs that may be given us, we are seriously to consider the nature of them, with respect unto those by whom they are managed: for all the things we have mentioned are suited to influence our minds unto a regard of them, and compliance with them.

3. The matter of a reproof is duly to be weighed by him, who designs any benefit thereby. And the first consideration of it is, Whether it be true, or false. I shall not carry them unto a more minute distribution, of the substance and

circumstances of the matter intended, of the whole or part of it; but do suppose that from some principal consideration of it, every reproof, as to its matter, may be denominated and esteemed true, or false. And here our own consciences, with due application unto the rule, are the proper judge and umpire. Conscience, if any way enlightened from the word, will give an impartial sentence concerning the guilt or innocence of the person, with respect unto the matter of a reproof. And there can be no more infallible evidence of a miscarriage in such a condition, than when pride, or passion, or prejudice, or any corrupt affection, can either outbrave, or stifle that compliance with a just reproof, which conscience will assuredly tender; Rom. ii. 14.

(1.) If a reproof, as to the matter of it, be false, or unjust, and so judged in an unbiassed conscience, it may be considered in matter of right, and of fact. In the first case the matter may be true, and yet the reproof formally false and evil: in the latter the matter may be false, and yet the reproof an acceptable duty.

[1.] A reproof is false in matter of right, or formally, when we are reproved for that as evil, which is indeed our duty to perform. So David was fiercely reproved by his brother Eliab for coming unto the battle against the Philistines, ascribing it to his pride, and the naughtiness of his heart. Whereunto he only replied, 'What have I done? Is there not a cause?' 1 Sam. xvii. 28, 29. And Peter rebuked our Lord Jesus Christ himself for declaring the doctrine of the cross; Mark viii. 33. And so we may be reproved for the principal duties that God requireth of us. And if men were as free in reproving, as they are in reproaching, we should not escape from daily rebukes, for whatever we do in the worship of God. Now though such reproofs generally may be looked on as temptations, and so to be immediately rejected, as they were in the cases instanced in; yet may they sometimes, where they proceed from love, and are managed with moderation, be considered as necessary cautions to look heedfully unto the grounds and reasons we proceed upon in the duties opposed, at which others do take offence.

[2.] If the reproof be false in matter of fact, wherein that

is charged on us, and reproved in us, whereof we are no ways guilty, three things are to be considered that it may not be unuseful unto us.

1st. The circumstances of the reprover. As (1.) Whether he do proceed on some probable mistake: or (2.) Credulity and easiness in taking up reports: or (3.) On evil, groundless surmises of his own: or (4.) From a real godly jealousy, which hath been imposed on, as easily it will be, by some appearances of truth. Without a due consideration of these things, we shall never know how to carry it aright towards them, by whom we are reproved for that whereof we are not guilty.

2dly. Consider aright the difference between a reproof and a reproach: for they may be both false alike, and that whereof we are reproved have no more truth in it, than that wherewith we are reproached. Yea, we may be honestly reproved for that which is false, and wickedly reproached with that which is true. So Augustin calls the language of the maid unto her mother about drinking wine, 'durum convitium,' though the matter of it were true enough. But a reproach is the acting of a mind designing of, and rejoicing in evil. Unto a reproof it is essential that it spring from love. 'Whom I love I rebuke,' is the absolute rule of these things. Let a man rebuke another, though for that which indeed is false, if it be in love, it is a reproof; but let him rebuke another, though for that which is true, if it be from a mind delighting in evil, it is a reproach; and if it be false, it is moreover a calumny.

3dly. Where a man in such cases is fully justified by the testimony of his own conscience, bearing witness unto his integrity and innocency; yet may he greatly miscarry under the occasion, if he attend not diligently unto his own spirit, which most men judge to be set at the utmost liberty under such injurious provocations, as they esteem them. Wherefore to keep our minds unto sedate, Christian moderation in such cases, and that we may not lose the advantage of what is befallen us, we ought immediately to apply them unto such other duties as the present occasion doth require. As,

(1st.) To search our own hearts and ways, whether we have not indeed upon us the guilt of some greater evils than

that which is falsely charged on us, or for which we are reproved on mistake. And if it appear so upon examination, we shall quickly see what little reason we have to tumultuate, and rise up with indignation against the charge we suffer under. And may we not thence see much of the wisdom and goodness of God, who suffereth us to be exercised with what we can bear off with the impenetrable shield of a good conscience, whilst he graciously hides and covers those greater evils of our hearts, with respect whereunto we cannot but condemn ourselves?

(2dly.) To consider that it is not of ourselves, that we are not guilty of the evil suspected and charged. No man of sobriety can on any mistake reprove us for any thing, be it never so false, but that it is merely of sovereign grace that we have not indeed contracted the guilt of it. And humble thankfulness unto God on this occasion, for his real preserving grace, will abate the edge, and take off the fierceness of our indignation, against men for their supposed injurious dealings with us.

(3dly.) Such reproofs, if there be not open malice and continued wickedness manifest in them, are to be looked on as gracious providential warnings, to take heed lest at any time we should be truly overtaken with that which at present we are falsely charged withal. We little know the dangers that continually attend us, the temptations wherewith we may be surprised at unawares, nor how near on their account we may be unto any sin or evil, which we judge ourselves most remote from, and least obnoxious unto. Neither on the other hand can we readily understand the ways and means whereby the holy, wise God issueth forth those hidden provisions of preventing grace, which are continually administered for our preservation. And no wise man, who understands any thing of the deceitfulness of his own heart, with the numberless numbers of invisible occasions of sin, wherewith he is encompassed continually, but will readily embrace such reproofs, as providential warnings unto watchfulness in those things whereof before he was not aware.

(4thly.) When the mind by these considerations is rendered sedate, and weighed unto Christian moderation, then ought a man in such cases patiently and peaceably to un-

dertake the defence of his innocency, and his own vindication. And herein also there is need of much wisdom and circumspection; it being a matter of no small difficulty for a man duly to manage self and innocency, both which are apt to influence us unto some more than ordinary vehemency of spirit.

But the directions which might, and indeed ought to be given under all these particular heads, would by no means be confined unto the limits fixed to this discourse.

(2.) If the matter of the reproof be true in fact, then it is duly to be considered, whether the offence, for which any one is reproved, be private or public, attended with scandal.

[1.] If it be private, then it is to be weighed, whether it was known unto, and observed, in and by the person himself reproved or no, before he was reproved. If it were not so known, as we may justly be reproved for many things, which through ignorance, or inadvertency, or compliance with the customs of the world, we may have taken no notice of; and if the reproof bring along light and conviction with it, the first especial improvement of such a peculiar reproof is thankfulness to God for it, as a means of deliverance from any way, or work, or path, that was unacceptable in his sight. And hence a great prospect may be taken, of the following deportment of the mind under other reproofs. For a readiness to take in light and conviction with respect unto any evil, that we are ignorant of, is an evidence of a readiness to submit to the authority of God in any other rebukes that have their convictions going before them: so the heart that is prone to fortify itself by any pleas or pretences against convictions of sin, in what it doth not yet own so to be, will be as prone unto obstinacy under reproofs, in what it cannot but acknowledge to be evil. If it were known before to the person reproved, but not supposed by him to be observed by others, under the covert of which imagination, sin often countenanceth itself, that soul will never make a due improvement of a reproof, who is not first sensible of the care and kindness of God, in driving him from that retreat and hold, where the interest of sin had placed its chiefest reserve.

[2.] Sins, so far public as to give matter of offence or scandal, are the ordinary subject of all orderly reproofs, and therefore need not in particular to be spoken unto.

Having shewed the nature of reproofs in general, with such considerations of the matter of them, as have afforded occasion unto sundry particular directions relating unto the duty under discussion; it remains, that we explain and confirm the other two generals comprised in the observation deduced from the text; namely, Why we ought to receive reproofs, orderly, or regularly given unto us, esteeming of them as a singular privilege. And how we may duly improve them unto their proper end, the glory of God, and the spiritual advantage of our own souls.

II. As to the first of these we may observe,

1. That mutual reproofs for the curing of evil, and preventing of danger in one another, are prime dictates of the law of nature, and that obligation, which our participation in the same being, offspring, original, and end, to seek the good of each other, doth lay upon us. This God designed in our creation, and this the rational constitution of our natures directs us unto. To seek and endeavour for each other all that good, whereof we are capable in time, or unto eternity, was indelibly implanted upon our natures, and indispensably necessary unto that society among ourselves, with the great end of our joint living unto God, for which we were made. All the mutual evils of mankind, whether of persons, or of nations, designed or perpetrated against one another, are effects of our fatal prevarication from the law of our creation. Hence Cain, the first open violent transgressor of the rules and bounds of human society, thought to justify or excuse himself by a renunciation of that principle, which God in nature had made the foundation of a political or sociable life, with respect unto temporal and eternal ends: 'Am I,' saith he, 'my brother's keeper?' Gen. iv. Yea, God had made every man the keeper of his brother so far, as that they should in all things in their opportunities, and unto their power, seek their good, and deliverance from evil. In those things which are good unto us, those which are spiritual and eternal have the pre-eminence. These nothing can prejudice but sin and moral evils, whose prevention therefore in one another, so far as we are able, is a duty of the law of nature, and the prime effect of that love, which we owe unto the whole offspring of that 'one blood,' whereof God hath made all nations. And one of the most effectual

means for that end are the reproofs whereof we treat. And the obligation is the same on those that give them, and those to whom they are given, with respect unto their several interests in this duty. Wherefore to neglect, to despise, not thankfully to receive such reproofs, as are justly and regularly given unto us at any time, is to contemn the law of our creation, and to trample on the prime effect of fraternal love. Yea, to despise reproofs, and to discountenance the discharge of that duty, is to open a door unto that mutual hatred and dislike, which in the sight of God is murder: see Lev. xix. 17. with 1 John iii. 15. Let us therefore look to ourselves, for there is no greater sign of a degeneracy from the law, and all the ends of our creation, than an unwillingness to receive reproofs, justly deserved, and regularly administered; or not to esteem of them, as a blessed effect of the wisdom and goodness of God towards us.

2. Whereas the light of nature is variously obscured, and its directive power debilitated in us, God hath renewed on us an obligation unto this duty by particular institutions, both under the Old Testament and the New. The truth is, the efficacy of the law of creation, as unto moral duties, being exceedingly impaired by the entrance of sin; and the exercise of original, native love towards mankind being impeded and obstructed by that confusion and disorder, whereinto the whole state of mankind was cast by sin, every one thereby being made the enemy of another, as the apostle declares, Tit. iii. 3. not being cured by that coalescency into evil societies which respects only political and temporal ends, the discharge of this duty was utterly lost, at least beyond that which was merely parental. Wherefore God in the institution of his church, both under the Old Testament and the New, did mould men into such peculiar societies and relations, as wherein way might be made meet again for the exercise thereof. He hath so disposed of us, that every one may know every one whom he is obliged to reprove, and every one may know every one whom he is obliged to hear. And as he hath hereby cured that confusion we were cast into, which was obstructive of the exercise of this duty; so by the renovation of positive commands, attended with instructions, directions, promises, and threatenings, enforcing the giving and receiving of reproofs with respect unto moral

and spiritual ends, he hath relieved us against that obscurity of natural light, which we before laboured under. Should I go to express the commands, directions, exhortations, promises, and threatenings, which are given in the Scripture to this purpose, it would be a work as endless, as I suppose it needless, to all that are conversant in the holy writings. It may suffice unto our present purpose, that there being an express institution of God for the giving and taking of reproofs, and that an effect of infinite goodness, benignity, and love towards us; not thankfully to receive reproofs, when it is our lot to deserve them, and to have them, is to despise the authority of God over us, and his gracious care for us. When therefore it befalleth any to be justly and orderly reproved, let him call to mind the authority and love of God therein; which will quickly give him that sense of their worth and excellency, as will make him thankful for them; which is the first step unto their due improvement.

3. A due consideration of the use, benefit, and advantage of them, will give them a ready admission into our minds and affections. Who knows how many souls, that are now at rest with God, have been prevented by reproofs, as the outward means, from going down into the pit? Unto how many have they been an occasion of conversion and sincere turning unto God? How many have been recovered by them from a state of backsliding, and awakened from a secure sleep in sin? How many great and bloody sins hath the perpetration of been obviated by them? How many snares of temptations have they been the means to break and cancel? What revivings have they been to grace, what disappointments unto the snares of Satan, who can declare? The advantages which the souls of men do, or might receive every day by them, is more to be valued than all earthly treasures whatever. And shall any of us, when it comes to be our concern, through a predominancy of pride, passion, and prejudice; or through cursed sloth and security, the usual means of the defeatment of these advantages; manifest ourselves to have no interest in, or valuation of, these things, by an unreadiness or unwillingness to receive reproofs, when tendered unto us in the way, and according to the mind of God?

III. But now suppose we are willing to receive them, it will be inquired in the last place, what considerations may further us in their due improvement, and what directions may be given thereunto.

An answer to this enquiry shall shut up this discourse. And I shall say hereunto,

1. If there be not open evidence unto the contrary, it is our duty to judge that every reproof is given us in a way of duty. This will take off offence with respect unto the reprover, which unjustly taken is an assured entrance into a way of losing all benefit and advantage by the reproof. The reason why any man doth regularly reprove another, is because God requireth him so to do, and by his command hath made it his duty towards him that is reproved. And do we judge it reasonable, that one should neglect his duty towards God and us, and in some degree or other make himself guilty of our sins, for no other cause, but lest we should be displeased, that we are not suffered to sin securely, and it may be to perish eternally? And if we are convinced that it is the duty of another to reprove us, we cannot but be convinced that it is our duty to hearken and attend thereunto. And this will fix the mind unto a due consideration of the present duty that lies before us, and what is our just concernment in the reproof. Besides, if it be done in a way of duty, it is done in love: for all orderly rebukes are effects of love. And if we are convinced of any one, that he doth reprove in a way of duty, we must be satisfied that what he doth proceedeth from love, without by-ends or dissimulation. For what doth not so, be it what it will, belongs not to rebuking in a way of duty. And this will remove all obstructing prejudices in all who have the least gracious ingenuity. Ahab despised the warning of Micaiah, because he thought they mutually hated one another; he knew how it was with himself, and falsely so judged of the prophet, by his necessary sharpness towards him. But where there are such surmises, all advantages of reproofs will be assuredly lost. Where therefore our minds are satisfied that any reproof is an effect of love, and given in a way of duty, 'dimidium facti,' we are half way in the discharge of the duty directed unto.

2. Take heed of cherishing habitually such disorders, vices, and distempers of mind, as are contrary unto this duty, and will frustrate the design of it. Such are,

(1.) Hastiness of spirit. Some men's minds do with such fury apply themselves unto their first apprehension of things, that they cast the whole soul into disorder, and render it incapable of farther rational considerations. There may be, it is possible, some failures and mistakes in useful and necessary reproofs, in matter, manner, circumstance, some way, or other. This immediately is seized on by men of hasty spirits (a vice and folly sufficiently condemned in Scripture) turned unto a provocation, made a matter of strife and dispute, until the whole advantage of the reproof is utterly lost and vanisheth. A quiet, gentle, considerative, sedate frame of spirit is required unto this duty.

(2.) Pride, and haughtiness of mind, self-conceit, elation of spirit, which will be inseparably accompanied with the contempt of others, and a scorn that any should think themselves either so much wiser, or so much better than ourselves, as to reprove us in any kind, are a fenced wall against any benefit, or advantage by reproofs; yea, things that will turn judgment into hemlock, and the most sovereign antidote into poison. No wild beast in a toil doth more rave, and tear, and rend, than a proud man when he is reproved. And therefore he who manifests himself so to be, hath secured himself from being any more troubled by serious reproofs from any wise man whatever. See Prov. ix. 7. 8.

(3.) Prejudices, which are so variously occasioned, as it were endless to recount. If now we make it not our constant business to purge our minds from these depraved affections, they will never fail effectually to exert themselves on all occasions to the utter defeatment of all use in, or benefit by, the most necessary and regular reproofs.

3. Reckon assuredly, that a fault, a miscarriage, which any one is duly reproved for, if the reproof be not received and improved as it ought, is not only aggravated, but accumulated with a new crime, and marked with a dangerous token of an incurable evil: see Prov. xxix. 1. Let men do what they can, bear themselves high in their expressions, grow angry, passionate, excuse, or palliate; unless they are seared and profligately obstinate, their own consciences will take

part with a just and regular reproof. If hereupon they come not up to amendment, their guilt is increased by the occasional excitation of the light of conscience to give it an especial charge. And there is an additional sin in the contempt of the reproof itself. But that which principally should make men careful, and even tremble in this case is, that they are put on a trial, whether ever they will forsake the evil of their ways and doings, or no. For he who is orderly reproved for any fault, and neglects, or despiseth the rebuke, can have no assurance that he shall ever be delivered from the evil rebuked; but hath just cause to fear, that he is entering into a course of hardness and impenitency.

4. It is useful unto the same end, immediately to compare the reproof with the word of truth. This is the measure, standard, and directory of all duties, whereunto in all dubious cases we should immediately retreat for advice and counsel. And whereas there are two things considerable in a reproof; first, the matter of it, that it be true, and a just cause, or reason of a rebuke; and, secondly, the right which the reprover hath unto this duty, with the rule which he walked by therein; if both these for the substance of them prove to be justified by the Scripture, then have we in such a case no more to do with the reprover, nor any of his circumstances, but immediately and directly with God himself: for where he gives express warranty and direction for a duty in his word, his own authority is as directly exerted thereby, as if he spoke unto us from heaven. Hereby will the mind be prevented from many wanderings, and vain reliefs, which foolish imagination will suggest, and be bound up unto its present duty. Let our unwillingness to be reproved be what it will, as also our prejudices against our reprover; if we are not at least free to bring the consideration and examination of the one and the other unto the word of truth, it is because our deeds are evil, and therefore we love darkness more than light. No milder, nor more gentle censure can be passed on any, who is not free to bring any reproof, that may be given him, unto an impartial trial by the word, whether it be according to the mind of God, or no. If this be done, and conviction of its truth and necessity do then appear; then let the soul know it hath to do with God himself, and wisely

consider what answer he will return, what account he will give unto him. Wherefore,

5. The best way to keep our souls in a readiness rightly to receive, and duly to improve such reproofs, as may regularly be given us by any, is to keep and preserve our souls and spirits in a constant awe and reverence of the reproofs of God, which are recorded in his word. The neglect, or contempt of these reproofs, is that which the generality of mankind do split themselves upon, and perish eternally. This is so fully and graphically expressed, Prov. i. that nothing can be added thereunto. And the great means whereby much hardness comes upon others, through the deceitfulness of sin, is want of keeping up a due sense or reverence of divine reproofs and threatenings on their souls. When this is done, when our hearts are kept up unto an awful regard of them, exercised with a continual meditation on them, made tender, careful, watchful by them, any just reproof from any, that falls in compliance with them, will be conscientiously observed, and carefully improved.

6. We shall fail in this duty unless we are always accompanied with a deep sense of our frailty, weakness, readiness to halt, or miscarry, and thereon a necessity of all the ordinances and visitations of God, which are designed to preserve our souls. Unless we have due apprehensions of our own state and condition here, we shall never kindly receive warnings beforehand to avoid approaching dangers; nor duly improve rebukes for being overtaken with them. It is the humble soul that feareth always, and that from a sense of its own weakness, yea, the treacheries and deceitfulness of its heart, with the power of those temptations, whereunto it is continually exposed, that is ever like to make work of the duty here directed unto.

SERMON XVI.*

THE

CHAMBER OF IMAGERY

IN THE

CHURCH OF ROME LAID OPEN:

OR,

AN ANTIDOTE AGAINST POPERY.

If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.—1 Pet. ii. 3.

When false worship had prevailed in the church of old, unto its ruin, God shewed and represented it unto his prophet, under the name and appearance of 'a chamber of imagery;' Ezek. viii. 11, 12. For therein were pourtrayed all the abominations wherewith the worship of God was defiled, and religion corrupted. Things relating unto divine truth and worship, have had again the same event in the world, especially in the church of Rome. And my present design is to take a view of the chambers of their imagery, and to shew what was the occasion, and what were the means of their erection; and in them we shall see all the abomination wherewith the divine worship of the gospel hath been corrupted, and Christian religion ruined. Unto this end it will be necessary to lay down some such principles of sacred truths, as will demonstrate and evince the grounds and causes of that transformation of the substance and power of religion into a lifeless image, which shall be proved to have fallen out amongst them. And because I intend their benefit principally who resolve all their persuasion in religion into the word of God, I shall deduce these principles from that passage of it in 1 Pet. ii. 1—3.

* This sermon was preached at the Morning Exercise at Cripplegate, 1682. In answer to this question, How is the practical love of truth the best preservative against Popery?

Ver. 1. contains an exhortation unto, or an injunction of, universal holiness, by the laying aside, or casting out whatever is contrary thereunto; 'Wherefore lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisy, and envy, and all evil speaking;' the rule whereof extends unto all other vicious habits of mind whatever.

And in ver. 2. there is a profession of the means whereby this end may be attained, namely, how any one may be so strengthened in grace, as to cast out all such sinful inclinations and practices as are contrary unto the holiness required of us, which is the divine word; compared therefore unto food, which is the means of preserving natural life, and of increasing its strength; 'As new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.'

Hereon the apostle proceeds in ver. 3. to declare the condition whereon our profiting, growing, and thriving by the word doth depend; and this is an experience of its power, as it is the instrument of God, whereby he conveys his grace unto us; 'If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' See 1 Thess. i. 5. Therein lies the first and chief principle of our ensuing demonstration, and it is this:

Principle I. All the benefit and advantage which any men do or may receive by the word, or the truths of the gospel, depend on an experience of its power and efficacy, in communicating the grace of God unto their souls.

This principle is evident in itself, and not to be questioned by any, but such as never had the least real sense of religion on their own minds. Besides, it is evidently contained in the testimony of the apostle before laid down.

Hereunto three other principles of equal evidence with itself are supposed and virtually contained in it.

Principle II. There is a power and efficacy in the word, and the preaching of it; Rom. i. 16. 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.'

It hath a divine power; the power of God accompanying it, and put forth in it, unto its proper ends; 'For the word of God is quick and powerful;' Heb. iv. 12.

Principle III. The power that is in the word of God, consists in its efficacy to communicate the grace of God unto the souls of men.

In and by it they 'taste that the Lord is gracious;' that is, its efficacy unto its proper ends. These are salvation, with all things requisite thereunto; such as the illumination of our minds, and the renovation of our natures, the justification of our persons, the life of God in holy worship and obedience, all leading unto our eternal enjoyment of him. These are the ends whereunto the gospel is designed in the wisdom of God, whereunto its efficacy is confined.

Principle IV. There is an experience to be obtained of the power and efficacy of the word.

In that place of the apostle it is expressed by 'tasting.' But there is something antecedent unto their tasting, specially so called, and something consequent unto it, both inseparable from it, and therefore belonging unto the experience whereof we speak. Wherefore,

1. The first thing required hereunto is light; that is, a spiritual supernatural light, enabling us to discern the wisdom, will, and mind of God in the word, in a spiritual manner, without which we can have no experience of its power. Hence 'the gospel is hid unto them that perish,' though it be outwardly declared unto them; 2 Cor. iii. 4. This is the only means which lets into the mind and conscience a sense of this efficacy. This, in the increases of it, the apostle prays for on the behalf of believers, that they may have this experience, Eph. i. 16—19. iii. 16—19. and declares the nature of it, 2 Cor. iv. 6.

2. The taste intended follows hereon; wherein consists the life and substance of the experience pleaded for. And this taste is a spiritual sense of the goodness, power, and efficacy of the word, and the things contained in it, in the conveyance of the grace of God unto our souls, in the instances mentioned, and others of a like nature; for in a taste, there is a sweetness unto the palate, and a satisfaction unto the appetite. By the one, in this taste our minds are refreshed; and by the other our souls are nourished; of both believers have an experience. And this is let into the mind by spiritual light, without which nothing of it is attainable. 'God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ;' 2 Cor. iv. 6.

3. To complete the experience intended, there follows

hereon a conformity in the whole soul and conversation unto the truth of the word, or the mind of God in it, wrought in us by its power and efficacy. So the apostle expresses it, Ephes. iv. 21—24. 'If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.'

Hereupon follows our last principle, which is the immediate foundation of the ensuing discourse, or that which is to be confirmed; and it is this:

Principle V. The loss of an experience of the power of religion hath been the cause of the loss of the truth of religion; or it hath been the cause of rejecting its substance, and setting up a shadow or image in the room of it.

This transformation of all things in religion, began and proceeded on these grounds. Those who had the conduct of it, were always possessed of the general notions of truth, which they could not forego without a total renunciation of the gospel itself. But having lost all experience of this power in themselves, they wrested them unto things quite of another nature, destructive to the truth, as well as devoid of its power; hereon it came to pass that there was a dead image made and set up of religion in all the parts of it, called by the name of that which was true and living, but utterly lost. All experience, I say, of the power and efficacy of the mystery of the gospel, and the truth of it, in communicating the grace of God unto the souls of men being lost, retaining the general notion of it, they contrived and framed an outward image or representation of them, suited unto their ignorance and superstition. Thus was the truth of religion once almost totally lost in the world, as we shall see; neither will it ever be lost any other way, or by any other means. When churches or nations are possessed of the truth and the profession of it, it is not laws, nor fines, nor imprisonments, nor gibbets, nor fires, that shall ever dispossess them, or deprive them of it. Whilst an experience of the power of religion continued in the primitive times, all the bloody rage and cruelty of the world, all the craft of Satan, and the sub-

tlety of seducers, who abounded, did utterly fail in attempting to deprive Christians of the truth, and the profession of it. But when this began to decay, and be lost amongst them, they were quickly deceived, and drawn off from the simplicity of the gospel. Upon the reformation of religion in these parts of the world, when the truth was received in the love and power of it, and multitudes had experience of the spiritual benefit and advantage which they received thereby, in liberty, holiness, and peace; all the prisons, tortures, swords, and fires, that were applied unto its extirpation, did nothing but diffuse the profession of it, and root it more firmly in the minds of men. It cannot be lost but by another way, and other means. The Jesuits and their associates, have been for a hundred years, contriving methods and arts for the dispossessing nations and churches of the truth which they have received, and the introducing the Romish superstition. They have written books about it, and practised according to their principles in every kingdom and state of Europe, who own the Protestant religion. But the folly of most of their pretended arts and devices unto this end, hath been ridiculous and unsuccessful; and what they have added hereunto of force, hath been divinely defeated. There is but one way, one effectual engine to deprive any people of the profession of the truth which they have once received; and that is, by leading them into such profaneness and ignorance, as whereby they may lose all experience of its power and efficacy in communicating the grace of God unto their souls, and therein of all sense of the advantage which they might have had by it. When this is done, men will as easy lay aside the profession of religion, as burdensome clothes in summer.

There is much talk of a plot and conspiracy to destroy the Protestant religion, and introduce popery again amongst us; they may do well to take care thereof, who are concerned in public affairs: but as unto the event, there is but one conspiracy that is greatly to be feared in this matter, and that is between Satan and the lusts of men; if they can prevail to deprive the generality of men of an experience in their own minds of the power and efficacy of the truth, with the spiritual advantage which they may have thereby, they will give them up to be an easy prey unto the other designers. And

there are two engines that are applied unto this purpose; the one is ignorance, the other is profaneness, or sensuality of life. Whenever either of these prevails, the experience intended must necessarily be lost and excluded: and the means of their prevailing, are want of due instruction by those who are the leaders of the people, and the encouragement of sensuality, by impunity and great examples. This is the only formidable conspiracy against the profession of the truth in this nation, without whose aid, all power and force will be frustrate in the issue. And as there is a great appearance in divine permission of such a state of things at present amongst us, so if they be managed by counsel also, and that those ways of ignorance and sensuality, are countenanced and promoted for this very end, that the power of truth being lost, the profession of it may be given up on easy terms, there is nothing but sovereign grace that can prevent the design. For the principle which we have laid down, is uncontrollable in reason and experience; namely, that the loss of an experience of the power of religion, will issue one way or other, in the loss of the truth of religion, and the profession of it. Whence is it that so many corrupt opinions have made such an inroad on the Protestant religion, and the profession of it? Is it not from hence, that many have lost an experience of the power and efficacy of the truth, and so have parted with it? Whence is it that profaneness and sensuality of life, with all manner of corrupt lusts of the flesh, have grown up, unto the shame of profession? Is it not from the cause, as the apostle expressly declares it comes by? 2 Tim. iv. 2—5. One way or other the loss of experience of the power of truth, will end in the loss of the profession of it.

But I proceed unto the instance which I do design in the church of Rome. For the religion of it at this day is nothing but a dead image of the gospel, erected in the loss of an experience of its spiritual power, overthrowing its use, with all its ends, being suited to the taste of men, carnal, ignorant, and superstitious. This I shall make evident by all sorts of instances in things relating to the person and offices of Christ; the state, order, and worship of the church; with the graces and duties of obedience required in the gospel. And in all, my principal design is to demonstrate what

is the only way and means of securing our own souls, any church or nation, from being ensnared with, or prevailed against by popery.

1. It is a general notion of truth, that the Lord Christ in his person and grace, is to be proposed and represented unto men as the principal object of their faith and love.

He himself in his divine person, is absolutely invisible unto us, and as unto his human nature absent from us. For the heavens must receive him until the time of the restitution of all things. There must therefore an image or representation of him be made unto our minds, or he cannot be the proper object of our faith, trust, love, and delight. This is done in the gospel, and the preaching of it; for therein he is 'evidently set forth before our eyes, as crucified amongst us;' Gal. iii. 1. So also are all the other concerns of his person and offices therein, clearly proposed unto us; yea, this is the principal end of the gospel, namely, to make a due representation of the person, offices, grace, and glory of Christ, unto the souls of men, that they may believe in him, and 'believing, have eternal life;' John xx. 31. Upon this representation made of Christ and his glory in the gospel, and the preaching of it, believers have an experience of the power and efficacy of the divine truth contained therein, in the way before mentioned, as the apostle declares, 2 Cor. iii. 18. 'For we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' Having a spiritual light to discern and behold the glory of Christ, as represented in the glass of the gospel, they have experience of its transforming power and efficacy, changing them into the likeness of the image represented unto them, that is, of Christ himself; which is the saving effect of gospel power. But this spiritual light was lost among men, through the efficacy of their darkness and unbelief; they were not able to discover the glory of Christ, as revealed and proposed in the gospel, so as to make him the present object of their faith and love. And this light being lost, they could have no experience of the power of divine truth concerning him, changing them into his image. They could make no affecting discovery of him in the Scripture. All things therein were dark and confused, or at least

seemed an inaccessible mystery, which they could not reduce to practice. Hence those who had got the public conduct of religion, drove the people from reading the Scripture, as that which was of no use, but rather dangerous unto them. What shall these men then betake themselves unto? Shall they reject the notion in general, that there ought to be such a representation made of Christ unto the minds of men, as to inflame their devotion, to excite their faith, and stir up their affection to him? This cannot be done without an open renunciation of him, and of the gospel as a fable. Wherefore they will find out another way for it, another means, unto the same end. And this is, by making images of him of wood and stone, or gold and silver, or painting on them. Hereby they supposed he would be made present unto his worshippers. That he would be so represented unto them, as that they should be immediately stirred up unto the embraces of faith and love. And herein they found sensible effects unto their great satisfaction: for their minds being dark, carnal, and prone to superstition, as are the minds of all men by nature, they could see nothing in the spiritual representation of him in the gospel, that had any power on them, or did in any measure affect them. In these images, by the means of sight and imagination, they found that which did really work upon their affections, and as they thought, did excite them unto the love of Christ.

And this was the true original of all the imagery in the church of Rome, as something of the same nature in general was of all the image worship in the world. So the Israelites in the wilderness when they made the golden calf, did it to have a representation of a deity near unto them, in such a visible manner, as that their souls might be affected with it; so they expressed themselves, Exod. xxxii. 1. Wherefore in this state, under a loss of spiritual light and experience, men of superstitious minds, found themselves entangled. They knew it necessary that there should be such a representation made of Christ, as might render him a present object of faith and love, wherewith they might be immediately affected. How this was done in the gospel, they could not understand, nor obtain any experience of the power and efficacy of it unto this end. Yet the principle

itself must be retained, as that without which there could be no religion; wherefore to extricate themselves out of this difficulty, they brake through all God's commands to the contrary, and betook themselves to the making images of Christ, and their adoration. And from small beginnings, according as darkness and superstition increased in the minds of men, there was a progress in this practice, until these images took the whole work of representing Christ and his glory, out of the hands, as it were, of the gospel, and appropriated it unto themselves. For I do not speak of them now so much as they are images of Christ, or objects of adoration; as of their being dead images of the gospel; that is, somewhat set up in the room of the gospel, and for the ends of it, as means of teaching and instruction. They shall do the work which the gospel was designed of God to do: for as unto this end of the representation of Christ, as the present object of the faith and love of man, with an efficacy to work upon their affections, there is in the church of Rome a thousand times more ascribed unto them, than unto the gospel itself. The whole matter is stated by the apostle, Rom. x. 6—8. 'The righteousness which is of faith, speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend unto heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.' The inquiry is, How we may be made partakers of Christ, and righteousness by him; or how we may have an interest in him, or have him present with us. This, saith the apostle, is done by the word of the gospel which is preached, which is nigh unto us in our mouths, and in our hearts; no, say these men, we cannot understand how it should be so; we do not find that it is so, that Christ is made nigh unto us, present with us by this word. Wherefore we will ascend into heaven to bring down Christ from above; for we will make images of him in his glorious state in heaven, and thereby he will be present with us, or nigh unto us. And we will descend into the deep, to bring up Christ again from the dead; and we will do it, by making first crucifixes, and then images of his glorious resurrection, bringing him again unto us from the dead. This shall be

in the place and room of that word of the gospel which you pretend to be alone useful and effectual unto these ends.

This therefore is evident, that the introduction of this abomination in principle and practice, destructive unto the souls of men, took its rise from the loss of an experience of the representation of Christ in the gospel, and the transforming power in the minds of men, which it is accompanied with, in them that believe. 'Make us gods,' say the Israelites, 'to go before us; for as for this man Moses' (who represented God unto us) 'we know not what is become of him.' What would you have men do? would you have them live without all sense of the presence of Christ with them, or being nigh unto them? Shall they have no representation of him? No, no, make us gods that may go before us; let us have images unto this end; for how else may it be done, we cannot understand. And this is the reason of their obstinacy in this practice against all means of conviction: yea, they live hereon in a perpetual contradiction unto themselves: their temples are full of graven images like the house of Micah, houses of God; and yet in them are the Scriptures (though in a tongue unknown to the people) wherein that practice is utterly condemned, that a man would think them distracted to hear what their book says, and to see what they do in the same place. But nothing will reach unto their conviction until the veil of blindness and ignorance be taken from their minds; until they have spiritual light enabling them to discern the glory of Christ as represented in the gospel, and to let in an experience of the transforming power and efficacy of that revelation in their own souls, they will never part with that means for the same end, which they are sensible of, to be useful unto it; and which is suited unto their inclination. Whatever be the issue, though it cost them their souls, they will not part with what they find, as they suppose, so useful unto their great end of making Christ nigh unto them; for that, wherein they can see nothing of it, and of whose power they can have no experience.

But the principal design of this discourse, is to warn others of these abominations, and to direct unto their avoidance: for if they should be outwardly pressed unto the practice of this idolatry, whatever is of carnal affection, of blind devotion, or superstition in them, will quickly be won over

unto a conspiracy against their convictions. Nothing will then secure them but an experience of the efficacy of that representation which is made of Christ in the gospel. It is therefore the wisdom and duty of all those who desire a stability in the profession of the truth, continually to endeavour after this experience, and an increase in it. He who lives in the exercise of faith and love in the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in the gospel, as evidently crucified, and evidently exalted therein, and finds the fruit of his so doing in his own soul, will be preserved in the time of trial. Without this, men will at last begin to think that it is better to have a false Christ than none at all; they will suppose that something is to be found in images, when they can find nothing in the gospel.

2. It is a prevalent notion of truth, that the worship of God ought to be beautiful and glorious.

The very light of nature seems to direct unto conceptions hereof. What is not so, may be justly rejected, as unbecoming the divine majesty; and therefore the more holy and heavenly any religion pretends to be, the more glorious is the worship prescribed in it, or ought so to be: yea, the true worship of God is the height and excellency of all glory in this world; it is inferior unto nothing, but that which is in heaven, which it is the beginning of, the way unto, and the best preparation for. Accordingly even that worship is declared to be glorious, and that in an eminent manner, above all the outward worship of the Old Testament in the tabernacle and temple, whose glory was great; and as unto external pomp, inimitable. To this purpose the apostle disputes at large, 2 Cor. iii. 6—10. This therefore is agreed, that there ought to be beauty and glory in divine worship, and that they are most eminently in that which is directed and required in the gospel. But withal the apostle declares in the same place, that this glory is spiritual, and not carnal; so did our Lord Jesus Christ foretel that it should be; and that unto that end all distinction of places, with all outward advantages and ornaments belonging unto them, should be taken away; John iv. 20—24.

It belongs therefore unto our present design to give a brief account of its glory, and wherein it excels all other ways of divine worship that ever were in the world; even that

under the Old Testament, which was of divine institution, wherein all things were ordered for beauty and glory. And it may be given in the instances that ensue.

(1.) The express object of it is God, not as absolutely considered, but as existing in three persons, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the principal glory of Christian religion and its worship. Under the Old Testament the conceptions of the church about the existence of the divine nature in distinct persons, were very dark and obscure; for the full revelation of it was not to be made, but in the distinct actings of each person in the works of redemption and salvation of the church; that is, in the incarnation of the Son, and mission of the Spirit, after he was glorified; John vii. 39. And in all the ways of natural worship, there was never the least shadow of any respect hereunto. But this is the foundation of all the glory of evangelical worship. The object of it in the faith of the worshipper, is the holy Trinity, and it consists in an ascription of divine glory unto each person in the same individual nature by the same act of the mind; where this is not, there is no glory in religious worship.

(2.) Its glory consists in that constant respect which it hath unto each divine person, as unto their peculiar work and actings for the salvation of the church; so it is described, Eph. ii. 18. 'Through him,' that is, the Son as mediator, 'we have our access by one Spirit unto the Father.' This is the immediate glory of evangelical worship, comprehensive of all the graces and privileges of the gospel. And to suppose that the glory of it doth consist in any thing but the light, graces, and privileges, which it doth itself exhibit, is a vain imagination: it will not borrow glory from the invention of men. We shall therefore a little consider it as it is here represented by the apostle.

[1.] The ultimate object of it, under this consideration, is God as the Father: 'We have an access therein unto the Father.' And this consideration in our worship of God as a Father, relating unto the whole dispensatian of his love and grace, by Jesus Christ, as he is his God and our God, his Father and our Father, is peculiar unto gospel-worship, and contains a signal part of its glory. We do not only worship God as a Father, so the very heathens had a notion that he

was the Father of all things; but we worship him, who is the Father, and as he is so, both in relation to the eternal generation of the Son, and the communication of grace by him unto us, as our Father; 'So no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him;' John i. 18. This access in our worship unto the person of the Father, as in heaven, the holy place above, as on a throne of grace, is the glory of the gospel. See Matt. vi. 9. Heb. iv. 16. x. 19—21.

[2.] The Son is here considered as a mediator; through him we have this access unto the Father. This is the glory that was hidden from former ages, but brought to light, and displayed by the gospel. So speaks our blessed Saviour himself unto his disciples; 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you: hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive;' John xvi. 23, 24. To ask God expressly in the name of the Son, as mediator, belongs unto the glory of the gospel-worship.

The especial instances of this glory are more than can be numerated. The chief of them may be reduced to these three heads:

1st. It is he who makes both the persons of the worshippers, and their duties accepted of God. See Heb. ii. 17, 18. iv. 16. x. 19.

2dly. He is the administrator of all the worship of the church in the holy place above, as its great high-priest over the house of God; Heb. viii. 2. Rev. viii. 3.

3dly. His presence with and among gospel-worshippers in their worship, gives it glory. This he declares and promises, Matt. xviii. 19, 20. 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' All success of the prayers of the church dependeth on, and ariseth from, the presence of Christ amongst them: he is so present for their assistance, and for their consolation. This presence of a living Christ, and not a dead crucifix, gives glory to divine worship. He who sees not the glory of this worship, from its relation unto Christ, is a stranger unto the gospel, with all the light, graces, and privileges of it.

[3.] It is in one spirit that we have access unto God in his worship; and in his administration doth the apostle place the glory of it, in opposition unto all the glory of the Old Testament, as doth our Lord Jesus Christ also in the place before referred unto; for,

1st. The whole ability for the observance and performance of it, according to the mind of God, is from him alone. His communication of grace and gifts unto the church, is that alone which makes it to give glory to God in his divine service. If this should cease, all acceptable worship would cease in the world. To think to observe the worship of the gospel, without the aid and assistance of the Spirit of the gospel, is a lewd imagination. But where he is, there is liberty and glory; 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18.

2dly. By him the sanctified minds of believers are made temples of God, and so the principal seal of evangelical worship; 1 Cor. iii. 16. vi. 19. This temple being of God's own framing, and of his own adorning by his Spirit, is a much more glorious fabric than any that the hands of men can erect.

3dly. By him is the church led into internal communion and converse with God in Christ, in light, love, and delight, with holy boldness; the glory whereof is expressed by the apostle, Heb. x. 19. 21, 22.

In these things, I say, doth the true glory of evangelical worship consist; and if it doth not, it hath no glory in comparison of that which did excel in the old legal worship. For the wit of man was never yet able to set it off with half the outward beauty and glory that was in the worship of the temple. But herein it is that it not only leaves no glory thereunto in comparison, but doth unspeakably excel whatever the wit and wealth of men can extend unto.

But there is a spiritual light required that we may discern the glory of this worship, and have thereby an experience of its power and efficacy in reference unto the ends of its appointment. This the church of believers hath. They see it, as it is a blessed means of giving glory unto God, and of receiving gracious communications from him, which are the ends of all the divine institutions of worship; and they have therein such an experience of its efficacy, as gives rest, and peace, and satisfaction, unto their souls. For they find,

that as their worship directs them unto a blessed view by faith, of God in his ineffable existence, with the glorious actings of each person in the dispensation of grace, which fills their hearts with joy unspeakable; so also that all graces are exercised, increased, and strengthened in the observance of it, with love and delight.

But all light into, all perceptions of this glory, all experience of its power, was amongst the most lost in the world. I intend in all these instances, the time of the papal apostacy. Those who had the conduct of religion could discern no glory in these things, nor obtain any experience of their power: be the worship what it will, they can see no glory in it, nor did it give any satisfaction to their minds; for having no light to discern its glory, they could have no experience of its power and efficacy. What then shall they do? The notion must be retained, that divine worship is to be beautiful and glorious. But in the spiritual worship of the gospel, they could see nothing thereof; wherefore they thought necessary to make a glory for it, or to dismiss it out of the world, and set up such an image of it, as might appear beautiful unto their fleshly minds, and give them satisfaction. To this end they set their inventions on work, to find out ceremonies, vestments, gestures, ornaments, music, altars, images, paintings, with prescriptions of great bodily veneration. This pageantry they call the beauty, the order, the glory, of divine worship. This is that which they see and feel, and which, as they judge, doth dispose their minds unto devotion; without it they know not how to pay any reverence unto God himself; and when it is wanting, whatever be the life, the power, the spirituality of the worship in the worshippers, whatever be its efficacy unto all the proper ends of it, however it be ordered according unto the prescription of the word, it is unto them empty, indecent, they can neither see beauty nor glory in it. This light and experience being lost, the introduction of beggarly elements and carnal ceremonies in the worship of the church, with attempts to render it decorous and beautiful, by superstitious rites and observances, wherewith it hath been defiled and corrupted, as it was and is in the church of Rome, was nothing but the setting up a deformed image in the room of it: and this they are pleased withal. The beauty and glory

which carving, and painting, and embroidered vestures, and musical incantations, and postures of veneration, do give unto divine service, they can see and feel, and in their own imagination are sensibly excited unto devotion by them. But hereby, instead of representing the true glory of the worship of the gospel, wherein it excels that under the Old Testament, they have rendered it altogether inglorious in comparison of it; for all the ceremonies and ornaments which they have invented for that end, come unspeakably short for beauty, order, and glory, of what was appointed by God himself in the temple, scarce equalling what was among the pagans.

It will be said, that the things whereunto we assign the glory of this worship are spiritual and invisible. Now this is not that which is inquired after; but that whose beauty we may behold, and be affected with. And this may consist in the things which we decry, at least in some of them: though I must say, if there be glory in any of them, the more they are multiplied, the better it must needs be; but this is that which we plead, men being not able by the light of faith, to discern the glory of things spiritual and invisible, do make images of them unto themselves, as gods that may go before them, and these they are affected withal: but the worship of the church is spiritual, and the glory of it is invisible unto eyes of flesh. So both our Saviour and the apostles do testify in the celebration of it: 'We come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel;' Heb. xii. 22—24. The glory of this assembly, though certainly above that of organs, and pipes, and crucifixes, and vestments, yet doth not appear unto the sense or imaginations of men.

That which I design here, is to obviate the meretricious allurements of the Roman worship, and the pretences of its efficacy to excite devotion and veneration by its beauty and decency. . The whole of it is but a deformed image of that glory which they cannot behold. To obtain and preserve in

our hearts an experience of the power and efficacy of that worship of God which is in spirit and truth, as unto all the real ends of divine worship, is that alone which will secure us. Whilst we do retain right notions of the proper object of gospel-worship, and of our immediate approach by it thereunto, of the way and manner of that approach through the mediation of Christ, and assistance of the Spirit; whilst we keep up faith and love unto their due exercise in it, wherein on our part the life of it doth consist, preserving an experience of the spiritual benefit and advantage which we receive thereby, we shall not easily be inveigled to relinquish them all, and give up ourselves unto the embraces of this lifeless image.

3. It is a universal unimpeachable persuasion among all Christians, that there is a near intimate communion with Christ, and participation of him in the supper of the Lord.

He is no Christian who is otherwise minded. Hence from the beginning, this was always esteemed the principal mystery in the 'agenda' of the church, and that deservedly; for this persuasion is built on infallible divine testimonies. The communication of Christ herein, and our participation of him, are expressed in such a manner as to demonstrate them to be peculiar; such as are not to be obtained in any other way, or divine ordinance whatever; not in praying, not in preaching, not in any other exercise of faith on the word or promises. There is in it an eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, with a spiritual incorporation thence ensuing, which are peculiar unto this ordinance. But, this especial and peculiar communion with Christ, and participation of him, is spiritual and mystical, by faith, not carnal or fleshly. To imagine any other participation of Christ in this life but by faith, is to overthrow the gospel. To signify the real communication of himself and benefits of his mediation unto them that believe, whereby they should become the food of their souls, nourishing them unto eternal life, in the very beginning of his ministry, he himself expresseth it by eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood; John vi. 53. 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.' But hereon many were offended, as supposing that he had intended an oral, carnal eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood,

and so would have taught them to be cannibals. Wherefore to instruct his disciples aright in this mystery, he gives an eternal rule of the interpretation of such expressions, ver. 63. 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.' To look for any other communication of Christ or of his flesh and blood, but what is spiritual, is to contradict him in the interpretation which he gives of his own words. Wherefore this especial communion with Christ, and participation of him is by faith. If it were not, unbelievers ought all to partake of Christ as well as those that believe, which is a contradiction: for to believe in Christ, and to be made partakers of him, are one and the same. We must therefore find this peculiar participating of Christ in the special actings of faith, with respect unto the especial and peculiar exhibition of Christ unto us in this ordinance.

And these actings of faith are divers and many, but may be referred unto four heads.

(1.) It acts itself by obedience unto the authority of Christ in this institution. This is the foundation of all communion with Christ, or participation of him in any ordinance of divine worship whatever, that is peculiarly of his own sovereign appointment, and that in, and with such circumstances as unto the time, or season, and manner of it, as requires especial actings of faith with respect thereunto; for the institution of this ordinance was in the close of his ministry or prophetical office on the earth, and in the entrance of the exercise of his priestly office in offering himself a sacrifice unto God for the sins of the church; between them both, and to render them both effectual unto us, he interposed an act of his kingly office in the institution of this ordinance. And it was in the same night wherein he was betrayed, when his holy heart was in the highest exercise of zeal for the glory of God, and compassion for the souls of sinners; faith hath herein an especial regard unto all these things. It doth not only act itself by a subjection of soul and conscience unto the authority of Christ in the institution, but respects also the exerting of his authority in the close of his prophetical, and entrance of the exercise of his sacerdotal office, on the earth; with all those other circumstances of it, which recommend it unto the souls and con-

sciences of believers. This is peculiar unto this ordinance, and unto this way of the participation of Christ. And herein faith in its due exercise gives the soul an intimate converse with Christ.

(2.) There is in this divine ordinance, a peculiar representation of the love and grace of Christ in his death and sufferings, with the way and manner of our reconciliation unto God thereby. The principal design of the gospel is to declare unto us the love and grace of Christ, and our reconciliation unto God by his blood. Howbeit herein there is such an eminent representation of them, as cannot be made by words alone. It is a spiritual image of Christ proposed unto us, intimately affecting our whole souls. These things, namely, the ineffable love and grace of Christ, the bitterness of his sufferings and death in our stead, the sacrifice that he offered by his blood unto God, with the effect of it in atonement and reconciliation, being herein contracted into one entire proposal unto our souls, faith is exercised thereon in a peculiar manner, and so as it is not in any divine ordinance or way of the proposal of the same things unto us. All these things are indeed distinctly, and in parts, set before us in the Scripture for our instruction and edification. But as the light which was first made and diffused unto the whole creation, did suffice to enlighten it in a general way, yet was far more useful, glorious and conspicuous, when it was reduced and contracted into the body of the sun: so the truths concerning Christ, as they are diffused through the Scripture, are sufficient for the illumination and instruction of the church; but when by divine wisdom and institution they are contracted into this ordinance, their taste and efficacy is more eminent and communicative unto the eyes of our understandings, that is, our faith, than as merely proposed by parts and parcels in the word. Hereby faith leads the soul unto a peculiar communion with Christ, which is thereon made partaker of him in an especial manner.

(3.) Faith herein respects the peculiar way of the communication and exhibition of Christ unto us, by symbols, or sensible outward signs of bread and wine. It finds the divine wisdom and sovereignty of Christ in the choice of them, having no other foundation in reason or the light of nature; and the representation that is made herein of him, with the

benefits of his death and oblation, is suited unto faith only, without any aid of sense or imagination: for although the symbols are visible, yet their relation unto the things signified, is not discernible unto any sense or reason. Had he chosen for this end an image or a crucifix, or any such actions as did by a kind of natural and sensible resemblance, shew forth his passion, and what he did and suffered, there had been no need of faith in this matter. And therefore as we shall see, such things are found out unto this end, by such as lost the use and exercise of faith herein. Besides, it is faith alone that apprehends the sacramental union that is between the outward signs and the things signified by virtue of divine institution: and hereby the one, that is, the body and blood of Christ, are really exhibited and communicated unto the souls of believers, as the outward signs are unto their bodily senses, the signs becoming thereby sacramentally unto us, what the things signified are in themselves, and are therefore called by their names. Herein there is a peculiar exercise of faith, and a peculiar participation of Christ, such as are in no other ordinance whatever. Yea, the actings of faith with respect unto the sacramental union and relation between the signs and things signified, by virtue of divine institution and promise, is the principal use and exercise of it herein.

(4.) There is a peculiar exercise of faith in the reception of Christ, as his body and blood are rendered and exhibited unto us in the outward signs of them; for though they do not contain carnally the flesh and blood of Christ in them, nor are turned into them, yet they really exhibit Christ unto them that believe in the participation of them; faith is the grace that makes the soul to receive Christ, and whereby it doth actually receive him. 'To as many as received him, even unto them that believe in his name;' John i. 12. And it receives him according as he is proposed and exhibited unto us in the declaration and promise of the gospel, wherein he is proposed; it receives him by the gracious assent of the mind unto this truth, the choice of him, cleaving and trusting unto him with the will, heart, and affection, for all the ends of his person and offices, as the mediator between God and man; and in the sacramental mysterious proposal of him, his body and blood; that is, in the efficacy of his

death and sacrifice, in this ordinance of worship, faith acts the whole soul in the reception of him unto all the especial ends for which he is exhibited unto us, in this way and manner. What these ends are which give force and efficacy unto the actings of faith herein, this is not a proper place to declare.

I have mentioned these things, because it is the great plea of the Papists at this day, in behalf of their transubstantiation, that if we reject their oral or carnal manducation of the flesh of Christ, and drinking of his blood, there cannot be assigned a way of participation of Christ in the receiving of him in this sacrament, distinct from that which is done in the preaching of the word. But hereby, as we shall see, they only declare their ignorance of this heavenly mystery. But of this blessed intimate communion with Christ, and participation of him in the divine institution of worship, believers have experience unto their satisfaction and ineffable joy. They find him to be the spiritual food of their souls, by which they are nourished unto eternal life by a spiritual incorporation with him. They discern the truth of this mystery, and have experience of its power. Howbeit men growing carnal, and being destitute of spiritual light, with the wisdom of faith, utterly lost all experience of any communion with Christ, and participation of him in this sacrament; on the principles of gospel truth they could find nothing in it; no power, no efficacy, nothing that should answer the great and glorious things spoken of it, nor was it possible they should. For, indeed, there is nothing in it, but unto faith; as the light of the sun is nothing to them that have no eyes: a dog and a staff are of more use to a blind man than the sun, nor is the most melodious music any thing to them that are deaf; yet, notwithstanding this loss of spiritual experience, they retained the notion of truth, that there must be a peculiar participation of Christ in this sacrament, distinct from all other ways and means of the same grace.

Here the wits of men were hard put to it to find out an image of this spiritual communion, whereof in their minds they could have no experience; yet they fashioned one by degrees, and after they had greatened the mystery in words and expressions (whereof they knew nothing in its

power) to answer unto what was to be set up in the room of it, until they brought forth the horrid monster of transubstantiation, and the sacrifice of the mass; for hereby they provided that all those things which are spiritual in this communion, should be turned into, and acted in, things carnal: bread shall be the body of Christ carnally, the mouth shall be faith, the teeth shall be the exercise, the belly shall be the heart, and the priest shall offer Christ unto God. A viler image never was invented; and there is nothing of faith required herein; it is all but a fortifying of imagination against all sense and reason. Because there is a singular mystery in the sacramental union that is between the external signs and the things signified, whence the one is called by the name of the other, as the bread is called the body of Christ, which faith discerns in the exhibition and receiving of it, they have invented for a representation hereof, such a prodigious imagination of the real conversion or transubstantiation of the substance of the bread and wine, into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, as overthrows all faith, reason, and sense also. And in the room of that holy reverence of Christ himself in his institution of this ordinance in the mystical exhibition of himself unto the souls of believers, in the demonstration of his love, grace, and sufferings for them, they have set up a wretched image of an idolatrous adoration and worship of the host, as they call it, to the ruin of the souls of men. And whereas the Lord Jesus Christ, by once offering, perfected for ever them that are sanctified, appointing this ordinance for the remembrance of it, having lost that spiritual light whereby they might discern the efficacy of that one offering so long since accomplished, in the application of it by this ordinance unto the actual perfecting of the church; they have erected a new image of it, in a pretended daily repetition of the same sacrifice, wherein they profess to offer Christ again for the sins of the living and the dead, unto the overthrow of the principal foundation of faith and religion. All these abominations arose from the loss of an experience of that spiritual communion with Christ, and the participation of him by faith, which there is in this ordinance by divine institution. This cast the thoughts of men on invention of these images, to suit the general notion of truth unto the superstition of

their carnal minds. Nor is it ordinarily possible to retrieve them from these infatuations, unless God be pleased to communicate unto them that spiritual light, whereby they may discern the glory of this heavenly mystery, and have an experience of the exhibition of Christ unto the souls of believers therein, without these; from innumerable prejudices, and inflamed affections towards their idols, they will not only abide in their darkness against all means of conviction, but endeavour the temporal and eternal destruction of all that are otherwise minded.

This image, like that of Nebuchadnezzar, was once set up in this nation, with a law, that 'whoever would not bow down to it, and worship it, should be cast into the fiery furnace.' God grant it be so no more! but if it should, there is no preservation against the influence of force and fires, but a real experience of an efficacious communication of Christ unto our souls in this holy ordinance, administered according to his appointment. This, therefore, is that we ought with all diligence to endeavour; and this not only as the only way and means of our edification in this ordinance, by an exercise in grace, the strengthening of our faith, and present consolation, but as the effectual means of our preservation in the profession of the truth, and our deliverance from the snares of our adversaries. For whereas it is undeniable, that this peculiar institution, distinct from all other, doth intend and design a distinct communication and exhibition of Christ; if it be pressed on us, that these must be done by transubstantiation and oral manducation thereon, and can be no otherwise; nothing but an experience of the power and efficacy of the mystical communion with Christ in this ordinance, before described, will preserve us from being insnared by their pretences. There is not, therefore, on all accounts of grace and truth, any one thing of more concernment unto believers, than the due exercise of spiritual light and faith, unto a satisfactory experience of a peculiar participation of Christ in this holy institution.

The same is fallen out amongst them with reference unto the church, and all the principal concerns of it; having lost or renounced the things which belong unto its primitive constitution, they have erected a deformed image in their stead, as I shall manifest in some instances.

4. It is an unquestionable principle of truth, that the church of Christ is in itself a body, such a body as hath a head, whereon it depends, and without which it would immediately be dissolved.

A body without a head is but a carcase, or part of a carcase, and this head must be always present with it. A head distant from the body, separated from it, not united unto it by such ways and means as are proper unto their nature, is of no use. See Eph. iv. 15, 16. Col. ii. 19.

But there is a double notion of a head, as there is of a body also; for they both of them are either natural or political. There is a natural body, and there is a political body; and in each sense it must have a head of the same kind. A natural body must have a head of vital influence, and a political body must have a head of rule and government. The church is called a body, compared to it, is a body in both senses, or in both parts of the comparison, and in both must have a head. As it is a spiritual living body, compared to the natural, it must have a head of vital influence, without which it cannot subsist; and as it is an orderly society for the common ends of its institution, compared unto a political body, it must have a head of rule and government, without which neither its being, nor its use can be preserved. But these are only distinct considerations of the church, which is every way one and the same. It is not two bodies, for then it must have two heads; but it is one body under two distinct considerations, which divide not its essence, but declare its different respects unto its head.

And in general, all who are called Christians, are thus far agreed; nothing is of the church, nothing belongs unto it, which is not dependant on, which is not united to, the head. That which holds the head is the true church; that which doth not so, is no church at all. Herein we agree with our adversaries, namely, that all the privileges of the church, all the right and title of men thereunto, depend wholly on their due relation to the head of it, according to the distinct considerations of it; be that head who or what it will, that which is not united unto the head, which depends not on it, which is separated from it, belongs not to the church. This head of the church is Christ Jesus alone; for the church is but one, although on various considerations it be likened

unto two sorts of bodies. The catholic church is considered either as believing, or as professing; but the believing church is not one, and the professing another. If you suppose another catholic church, besides this one, whoso will may be the head of it, we are not concerned therein; but unto this church Christ is the only head: he only answers all the properties and ends of such a head to the church. This the Scripture doth so positively and frequently affirm, without the least intimation, either directly, or by consequence of any other head, that it is wonderful how the imagination of it should befall the minds of any, who thought it not meet at the same time to cast away their bibles.

But whereas a head is to be present with the body, or it cannot subsist, the inquiry is, How the Lord Christ is so present with his church? And the Scripture hath left no pretence for any hesitation herein; for he is so by his Spirit and his word, by which he communicateth all the powers and virtues of a head unto it continually. His promises of this way and manner of his presence unto the church are multiplied, and thereon doth the being, life, use, and continuance of the church depend; where Christ is not present by his Spirit and word, there is no church; and those who pretend so to be, are the synagogues of Satan, and they are inseparable and conjunct in their operation, as he is the head of influence unto the church, as also, as he is a head of rule; for in the former sense the Spirit worketh by the word, and in the latter, the word is made effectual by the Spirit. But the sense and apprehension hereof, was for a long time lost in the world, amongst them that called themselves the church. A head they did acknowledge the church must always have, without which it cannot subsist; and they confess that in some sense he was a head of influence unto it; they knew not how to have an image thereof; though by many other pernicious doctrines, they overthrew the efficacy and benefit of it. But how he should be the only head of rule unto the church they could not understand; they saw not how he could act the wisdom and authority of such a head, and without which the church must be headless. They said, he was absent and invisible, they must have one that they could see, and have access unto; he is in heaven, and

they know not how to make address to him, as occasion did require; all things would go to disorder, notwithstanding such a headship. The church is visible, and it must, they thought, have a visible head. It was meet also, that this head should have some such grandeur and pomp in the world, as became the head of so great and glorious a society as the church is. How to apply these things unto Christ and his presence with the church, by his word and Spirit, they knew not. Shall they then forego the principle, that the church is to have such a head and supreme ruler? That must not be done, but be sacredly retained; not only because to deny it in general, is to renounce the gospel; but because they had found out a way to turn it unto their own advantage; they would therefore make an image of Christ, as this head of the church, to possess the place, and act all the powers of such a head; for the church, they say, is visible, and must have a visible head: as though the catholic church, as such, were any other way visible, but as the head of it is, that is, by faith. That there must be a head and centre of union, wherein all the members of the church may agree and be united, notwithstanding all their distinct capacities and circumstances, and how this should be Christ himself, they know not; that without a supreme ruler present in the church, to compose all differences, and determine all controversies, even those concerning himself, which they vainly pretend unto, they expressly affirm, that there never was a society so foolishly ordered as that of the church. And hereon they conclude the insufficiency of Christ to be this sole head of the church, another they must have for these ends. And this was their pope, such an image as is one of the worst of idols that ever were in the world. Unto him they give all the titles of Christ, which relate unto the church, and ascribe all the powers of Christ in and over it, as unto its rule, to him also. But here they fell into a mistake; for when they thought to give him the power of Christ, they gave him the power of the dragon to use against Christ, and those that are his. And when they thought to make an image of Christ, they made an image of the first beast, set up by the dragon, which had two horns like a lamb, but spake as a dragon, whose character and employ is at large described, Rev. xiii. 11—17.

This is the sum of what I shall offer on this head; those who called themselves the church, had lost all spiritual light enabling them to discern the beauty and glory of the rule of Christ over the church as its head; and hereon their minds became destitute of all experience of the power and efficacy of his Spirit and word, continually to order the affairs thereof, in the ways, and through the use of means by himself appointed; they knew not how to acquiesce in these things, nor how the church could be maintained by them: wherefore in this case, 'They helped every one his neighbour, and every one said to his brother, Be of good comfort; so the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer, him that smiteth the anvil.' They set themselves in their several capacities, to frame this idol, and set him up in the place and stead of Christ, so fixing him in the temple of God, that he might shew himself from thence to be as God. Neither will this idol be ever cast out of the church, until the generality of Christians become spiritually sensible of the authority of Christ, exerting itself in the rule of the church, by his Spirit and his word, unto all the ends of unity, order, peace, and edification; until that be done, a pope, or something like him, will be thought necessary unto these ends. But never was there a more horrid deformed image made of so beautiful and glorious a head: all the craft of Satan, all the wits of men cannot invent any thing more unlike Christ, as the head of the church, than this pope is. A worse figure and representation of him cannot possibly be made.

This is he of whom, nothing not great, nothing common, nothing not exceeding the ordinary state of mankind, on the one hand or the other, is thought or spoken. Some say, he is the head and husband of the church, the vicar of Christ over the whole world, God's vicegerent, a vice-god, Peter's successor, the head and centre of unity unto the whole catholic church, endued with a plenitude of power, with other ascriptions of the same nature innumerable; whereon it is necessary unto every soul under pain of damnation, to be subject unto him. Others aver that he is antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition, the beast that came out of the earth with two horns like a lamb, and a voice like the dragon, the false prophet, the idol shepherd, the evil servant that

beateth his fellow-servants, the adulterer of a meretricious and false church; and there is no mean betwixt these; he is undoubtedly the one or the other. The Lord Jesus Christ, who hath determined this controversy already in his word, will ere long give it its ultimate issue in his own glorious person, and by the brightness of his coming. And this is an eminent idol in the chamber of imagery in the Roman church. But at present it is evident wherein lies the preservation of believers from being inveigled to bow down to this image, and to worship it. A due sense of the sole authority of Christ in and over his church, with an experience of the power of his word and Spirit unto all the ends of its rule and order, will keep them unto the truth herein, and nothing else will so do. And if once they decline from this in any instances, seem they never so small, so as to admit of any thing in the church, or its worship, which doth not derive immediately from his authority, they will be disposed to admit of another guide and head in all other things also.

5. Again, it is a notion of truth, that the church of Christ is beautiful and glorious.

There are many prophecies and predictions concerning it, that so it should be; and there are sundry descriptions given of it as such. Its relation unto Christ, with his love unto it, and valuation of it, do require that it should be so glorious; yea, his great design towards it, was to make it so to be; Eph. v. 25—27. This therefore all do agree in who profess Christian religion; but what that glory is, and wherein it doth consist, whence it is, and is said to be glorious, is not agreed upon. The Scripture indeed plainly declares this glory to be spiritual and internal, that it consists in its union unto Christ, his presence with it, the communication of his quickening Spirit unto it, the clothing of it with his righteousness, in its sanctification and purification from the defilement of sin, with its fruitfulness in obedience unto the praise of God. Add hereunto the celebration of divine worship in it, with its rule and order, according to the commandment of Christ, and we have the substance of this glory. And this glory believers do discern, so as to be satisfied with its excellency. They know that all the glories of the world are no way to be compared to it; for it consists in, and arises from, such things as they do value and prefer infinitely above

all that this world can afford. They are a reflexion of the glory of God, or of Christ himself upon the church, yea, a communication of it thereunto. This they value in the whole, and in every member of it; neither the nature, use, nor end of the church will admit that its glory should consist in things of any other nature. But the generality of mankind had lost that spiritual light, wherein alone this glory might be discerned. They could see no form or beauty in the spouse of Christ, as only adorned with his graces. To talk of a glorious state of men, whilst they are poor and destitute, it may be clothed with rags, and haled unto prisons or stakes, as hath been the lot of the church in most ages, was in their judgment a thing absurd and foolish. Wherefore seeing it is certain, that the church of Christ is very glorious and illustrious in the sight of God, holy angels, and good men, a way must be found out to make it so, and so to appear in the world. Wherefore they agreed on a lying image of this glory, namely, the dignity, promotion, wealth, dominion, power, and splendour of all them that had got the rule of the church. And although it be evident unto all, that these things belong unto the glories of this world, which the glory of the church is not only distinguished from, but opposed unto, yet it must be looked on as that wherein it is glorious; and it is so, though it have not one saving grace in it, as they expressly affirm. When these things are attained, then are all the predictions of its glory accomplished, and the description of it answered. This corrupt image of the true spiritual glory of the church, arising from an ignorance of it, and want of a real experience of the worth and excellency of things internal, spiritual, and heavenly, hath been attended with pernicious consequents in the world. Many have been infatuated by it, and enamoured of it, unto their own perdition. For as a teacher of lies, it is suited only to divert the minds of men from a comprehension and valuation of that real glory, wherein if they have not an interest they must perish for ever.

Look into foreign parts, as Italy and France, where these men pretend their church is in its greatest glory; what is it, but the wealth, and pomp, and power of men, for the most part openly ambitious, sensual, and worldly? Is this the glory of the church of Christ? Do these things belong unto his

kingdom? But by the setting up of this image, by the advancement of this notion, all the true glory of the church hath been lost and despised. Yet these things being suited unto the designs of the carnal minds of men, and satisfactory unto all their lusts; having got this paint and gilding on them, that they render the church of Christ glorious, have been the means of filling this world with darkness, blood, and confusion. For this is that glory of the church, which is contended for with rage and violence. And not a few, do yet doat on these images, who are not sharers in the advantage it brings unto its principal worshippers, whose infatuation is to be bewailed.

The means of our preservation from the adoration of these images also is obvious, from the principles we proceed upon. It will not be done, without light to discern the glory of things spiritual and invisible; wherein alone the church is glorious. And in the light of faith they appear to be what indeed they are in themselves, of the same nature with the glory that is above. The present glory of the church, I say, in its initiation into the glory of heaven, and in general of the same nature with it. Here it is in its dawnings and entrances, there in its fulness and perfection. To look for any thing that should be cognate, or of near alliance unto the glory of heaven, or any near resemblance of it, in the outward glories of this world, is a fond imagination. And when the mind is enabled to discern the true beauty and glory of spiritual things, with their alliance unto that which is above, it will be secured from seeking after the glory of the church in things of this world, or putting any value on them unto that end. That self-denial also which is indispensably prescribed in the gospel unto all the disciples of Christ, is requisite hereunto; for the power and practice of it, is utterly inconsistent with an apprehension, that secular power, riches, and domination, do contribute any thing unto the church's glory. The mind being hereby crucified unto a value and estimation of these things, it can never apprehend them as any part of that raiment of the church wherein it is glorious. But where the minds of men, through their native darkness, are disenabled to discern the glory of spiritual things, and through their carnal unmortified affection, do cleave unto, and have the highest esteem of, worldly grandeur, it is no

wonder, if they suppose the beauty and glory of the church to consist in them.

6. I shall add one instance more with reference unto the state of the church, and that is in its rule and discipline.

Here also hath been as fatal a miscarriage as ever fell out in Christian religion. For the truth herein being lost, as unto any sense and experience of its efficacy or power, a bloody image, destructive to the lives and souls of men, was set up in the stead thereof. And this also shall be briefly declared. There are certain principles of truth, with respect hereunto, that are acknowledged by all; as,

(1.) That the Lord Christ hath appointed a rule and discipline in his church, for its good and preservation; no society can subsist without the power and exercise of some rule in itself. For rule is nothing but the preservation of order, without which there is nothing but confusion. The church is the most perfect society in the earth, as being united and compacted by the best and highest bonds, which our nature is capable of; Eph. iv. 16. Col. ii. 19. It must therefore have a rule and discipline in itself, which from the wisdom and authority of him, by whom it was instituted, must be supposed to be the most perfect.

(2.) That this discipline is powerful and effectual unto all its proper ends. It must be so esteemed from the wisdom of him by whom it is appointed, and it is so accordingly. To suppose that the Lord Christ should ordain a rule and discipline in his church, that in itself and by its just administration, should not attain its ends, is to reflect the greatest dishonour upon him. Yea, if any church or society of professed Christians, be fallen into that state and condition, wherein the discipline appointed by Christ cannot be effectual unto its proper ends, Christ hath forsaken that church or society. Besides the Holy Ghost affirms, that the ministry of the church, in the administration of it, is mighty through God, unto all its ends; 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

(3.) The ends of this discipline are the order, peace, purity, and holiness of the church, with a representation of the love, care, and watchfulness of Christ over it, and a testimony unto his future judgment. An imagination of any other ends of it, hath been its ruin.

And thus far all who profess themselves Christians are

agreed, at least in words. None dare deny any of these principles, no not to secure their abuse of them, which is the interest of many.

(4.) But unto them all we must also add, and that with the same uncontrollable evidence of truth, that the power and efficacy of this discipline which it hath from the institution of Christ, is spiritual only, and hath all its effects on the souls and consciences of those who profess subjection unto him, with respect unto the ends before mentioned. So the apostle expressly describes it, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds: casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought unto the obedience of Christ.' These are the ends, as of preaching of the gospel, so of the discipline of the church; and these are the ways and means of its efficacy: it is spiritually mighty through God, unto all these ends, and others it hath none. But we shall immediately see the total reverse of this order, in an image substituted in the room of it.

(5.) Of the power and efficacy of this spiritual dicipline unto its proper end, the primitive Christians, at least, had experience. For three hundred years, the church had no other way or means for the preservation of its order, peace, purity, and holiness, but the spiritual efficacy of this discipline, on the souls and consciences of professed Christians. Neither did it fail therein, nor were the churches any longer preserved in peace and purity, than whilst they had this discipline alone for their preservation, without the least contribution of assistance from secular power, or any thing that should operate on the outward concerns of mankind. And there can be no other reason given, why it should not be of the same use and efficacy still unto all churches, but only the loss of all those internal graces, which are necessary to make any gospel institution effectual; wherefore, all sense and experience hereof, of the spiritual power and efficacy of this discipline was utterly lost, amongst the most of them that are called Christians. Neither those who had assumed a pretence of the administration of it, nor those towards whom it was administered, could find any thing in it, that did

affect the consciences of men, with respect unto its proper ends. They found it a thing altogether useless in the church, wherein none of any sort would be concerned. What shall they now do? What course shall they take? Shall they renounce all those principles of truth concerning it, which we have laid down, and exclude it both name and thing out of the church? This probably would have been the end of it, had they not found out a way to wrest the pretence of it unto their unspeakable advantage. Wherefore they contrived and made a horrid image of the holy, spiritual rule and discipline of the gospel: an image it was, consisting in outward force and tyranny over the persons, liberties, and lives of men; exercised with weapons, mighty through the devil to cast men into prison, and to destroy them. Hereby that which was appointed for the peace and edification of the church, being lost, an engine was framed under its name and pretence unto its ruin and destruction; and so it continues unto this day. It had never entered into the hearts of men, to set up a discipline in the church of Christ, by law, courts, fines, mulcts, imprisonments, and burnings, but that they had utterly lost in themselves, and suffered to be lost in others concerned, all experience of the power and efficacy of the discipline of Christ, towards the souls and consciences of men. But hereon they laid it aside, as a useless tool, that might do some service in the hands of the apostles, and the primitive churches, whilst there was spiritual life and sense left amongst Christians; but as unto them, and what they aimed at, it was of no use at all. The deformity of this image in the several parts of it, its universal dissimilitude unto that whose name it bears, and which it pretends to be, the several degrees whereby it was forged, framed, and erected, with the occasions and advantages taken for its exaltation, would take up much time to declare: for it was subtly interwoven with other abominations, in the whole mystery of iniquity, until it became the very life or animating principle of antichristianism. For however men may set light by the rule and discipline of Christ in his church, and its spiritual power or efficacy towards the souls and consciences of men, the rejection of it, and the setting up of a horrid image of worldly power, domination, and force in

the room of it, and under its name, is that which began, carried on, and yet maintains the fatal apostacy in the church of Rome.

I shall instance only in one particular. On the change of this rule of Christ, and together with it, the setting up of Mauzzim, or an image, or god of forces in the stead of it; they were compelled to change all the ends of that discipline, and to make an image of them also. For this new instrument of outward force, was of no use with respect unto them; for they are, as was declared, the spiritual peace, purity, love, and edification of the church. Outward force is no way meet to attain any of these ends. Wherefore they must make an image of these also, or substitute some dead form in their room; and this was a universal subjection unto the pope, according unto all the rules, orders, and canons which they should invent. Uniformity herein and canonical obedience, is all the end which they will allow unto their church discipline; and these things hang well together, for nothing but outward force by law and penalties, is fit to attain this end. So was there an image composed and erected of the holy discipline of Christ, and its blessed ends, consisting of these two parts, outward force and feigned subjection. For hardly can an instance be given in the world, of any man who ever bowed down to this image, or submitted unto any ecclesiastical censure, out of a conscientious respect unto it. Force and fear rule all.

This is that discipline, in whose execution the blood of an innumerable company of holy martyrs hath been shed; that wherein all the vital spirits of the papacy do act themselves, and whereby it doth subsist, and although it be the image of jealousy, or the image of the first beast, set up by the dragon, yet it cannot be denied, but that it is very wisely accommodated unto the present state of the generality of them that are called Christians amongst them. For being both blind and carnal, and having thereby lost all sense and experience of the spiritual power of the rule of Christ in their consciences, they are become a herd not fit to be governed or ruled any other way. Under the bondage of it therefore they must abide, till the veil of blindness be taken away, and they are turned unto God by his word and Spirit; for

'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there,' and there alone, is, liberty.'

7. Unto the foregoing particular instances, with respect unto the church, I shall yet add one more general, which is indeed comprehensive of them all; or the root from whence they spring; a root bearing gall and wormwood. And this is concerning the catholic church.

What belongs unto this catholic church, what is comprised in its communion, the apostle declares, Heb. xii. 22—25. It is 'the recapitulation of all things in heaven and earth in Christ Jesus.' Eph. i. 10. 'His body, his spouse, or bride, the Lamb's wife, the glorious temple, wherein God doth dwell by his Spirit;' a holy mystical society, purchased and purified by the blood of Christ, and united unto him by his Spirit, or the inhabitation of the same Spirit in him, and those whereof it doth consist. Hence they with him, as the body with its head, are mystically called Christ; 1 Cor. xii. 12. And there are two parts of it, the one whereof is already perfected in heaven, as unto their spirits, and the other yet continued in the way of faith and obedience in this world. Both these constitute 'one family in heaven and earth,' Eph. iii. 15. in conjunction with the holy angels, one mystical body, one catholic church. And although there is a great difference in their present state and condition, between these two branches of the same family, yet are they both equally purchased by Christ, and united unto him as their head, having both of them effectually the same principle of the life of God in them. Of a third part of this church, neither in heaven nor in earth, in a temporary state, participant somewhat of heaven, and somewhat of hell, called purgatory, the Scripture knoweth nothing at all, neither is it consistent with the analogy of faith, or the promises of God unto them that do believe, as we shall see immediately. This church, even as unto that part of it which is in this world, as it is adorned with all the graces of the Holy Spirit, is the most beautiful and glorious effect, next unto the forming and production of its head in the incarnation of the Son of God, which divine wisdom, power, and grace will extend themselves unto, here below: but these things, the glory of this state is visible only unto the eye of

faith; yea, it is perfectly seen and known only to Christ himself. We see it obscurely in the light of faith and revelation, and are sensible of it, according unto our participating of the graces and privileges wherein it doth consist.

But that spiritual light which is necessary to the discerning of this glory, was lost among those of whom we treat. They could see no reality nor beauty in these things, nor any thing that should be of advantage unto them. For upon their principle, of the utter uncertainty of men's spiritual estate and condition in this world, it is evident that they could have no satisfactory persuasion of any concernment in it. But they had possessed themselves of the notion of a catholic church, which with mysterious artifices they have turned unto their own incredible secular advantage. This is that whereof they boast, appropriating it unto themselves, and making it a pretence of destroying others, what lies in them both temporally and eternally. Unto this end they have formed the most deformed and detestable image of it that ever the world beheld; for the catholic church which they own, and which they boast that they are, instead of that of Christ, is a company or society of men, unto whom in order unto the constitution of that whole society, there is no one real Christian grace required, nor spiritual union unto Christ the head, but only an outside profession of these things, as they expressly contend. A society united unto the pope of Rome, as its head by a subjection unto him, and his rule according to the laws and canons whereby he will guide them. This is the formal reason and cause constituting that catholic church which they are, which is compacted in itself by horrid bonds and ligaments, for the ends of ambition, worldly domination and avarice. A catholic church openly wicked in the generality of its rulers, and them that are ruled; and in its state cruel, oppressive, and dyed with the blood of saints, and martyrs innumerable. This I say is that image of the holy catholic church, the spouse of Christ, which they have set up. And it hath been as the image of Moloch, that hath devoured and consumed the children of the church, whose cries, when their cruel stepmother pitied them not, and when their pretended ghostly fathers cast them into the flames, came up unto the ears of the Lord of hosts; and their blood still cries for

vengeance on this idolatrous generation. Yet is this pretence of the catholic church pressed in the minds of many, with so many sophistical artifices, through the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; proposed with the allurements of so many secular advantages, and imposed ofttimes on Christians with so much force and cruelty, that nothing can secure us from the admission of it, unto the utter overthrow of religion, but the means before insisted on. A spiritual light is necessary hereunto, to discern the internal spiritual beauty and glory of the true catholic church of Christ: where this is in its power, all the paintings and dresses of their deformed image will fall off from it, and its abominable filth will be made to appear. And this will be accompanied with an effectual experience of the glory and excellency of that grace in the souls of those that believe, derived from Christ the sole head of this church, whereby they are changed 'from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.' The power, life, and sweetness hereof, will give satisfaction unto their souls, to the contempt of the pretended order, or dependance on the pope as a head. By these means the true catholic church, which is the body of Christ, the fulness of him that filleth all in all, growing up unto him in all things who is the head, despiseth this image, and dagon will fall to the ground when this ark is brought in, yea, though it be in his own temple.

8. In the farther opening of this chamber of imagery, we shall yet, if it be possible, see greater abominations. At least that which doth next ensue, is scarce inferior unto any of them that went before. It is a principle in Christian religion, an acknowledged verity, that it is the duty of the disciples of Christ, especially as united in churches, to propagate the faith of the gospel, and to make the doctrine of it known unto all, as they have opportunity: yea, this is one principal end of the constitution of churches and officers in them; Matt. v. 13—16. 1 Tim. iii. 15.

This our Lord Jesus Christ gave in special charge unto his apostles at the beginning; Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Mark xvi. 15, 16. Hereby they were obliged unto the work of propagating the faith of the gospel, and the knowledge of him therein in all places, and were justified in their so doing. And this they did with that efficacy and success,

that in a short time, like the light of the sun, 'Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world;' Rom. x. 18. And the gospel was said to be 'preached unto every creature which is under heaven;' Col. i. 23. The way therefore, whereby they propagated the faith, was by diligent laborious preaching of the doctrine of the gospel unto all persons in all places, with patience and magnanimity in undergoing all sorts of sufferings on the account of it, and a declaration of its power in all those virtues and graces, which are useful and exemplary unto mankind. It is true, their office, and the discharge of it, is long since ceased; howbeit it cannot be denied but that the work itself is incumbent in a way of duty on all churches, yea, on all believers, as they have providential calls unto it, and opportunities for it. For it is the principal way whereby they may glorify God, and benefit men in their chiefest good, which without doubt they are obliged unto.

This notion of truth is retained in the church of Rome: and the work itself is appropriated by them, unto themselves alone. Unto them, and them only, as they suppose, it belongs to take care of the propagation of the faith of the gospel, with the conversion of infidels and heretics. Whatever is done unto this purpose by others, they condemn and abhor. What do they think of the primitive way of doing it, by personal preaching, sufferings, and holiness? Will the pope, his cardinals and bishops, undertake this work or way of the discharge of it? Christ hath appointed no other, the apostles and their successors knew no other, no other becomes the gospel; nor ever had success. No, they abhor and detest this way of it. What then is to be done? Shall the truth be denied? Shall the work wholly and avowedly be laid aside? Neither will this please them, because it is not suited unto their honour; wherefore they have erected a dismal image of it unto the horrible reproach of Christian religion. They have indeed provided a double painting for the image which they have set up. The first is the constant consult of some persons at Rome, which they call 'Congregatio de propaganda fide,' a council for the propagation of the faith, under the effect of whose consultations Christendom hath long groaned. And the other is, the sending of

missionaries as they call them, or a surcharge of friars from their over numerous fraternities upon their errands into remote nations.

But the real image itself consists of these three parts: (1.) The sword; (2.) The inquisitions; (3.) Plots and conspiracies.

By these, it is that they design to propagate the faith and promote Christian religion. And if hell itself can invent a more deformed image, and representation of the sacred truth and work, which it is a counterfeit of, I am much mistaken.

(1.) Thus have they in the first way carried Christian religion into the Indies, especially the western parts of the world, so called. First, the pope out of the plenitude of his power, gives unto the Spaniard all those countries, and the inhabitants of them, that they may be made Christians. But Christ dealt not so with his apostles, though he were Lord of all, when he sent them to teach and baptize all nations. He dispossessed none of them of their temporal rights or enjoyments, nor gave to his apostles a foot breadth of inheritance among them. But upon this grant, the Spanish Catholics propagated the faith, and brought in Christian religion amongst them. And they did it by killing and murdering many millions of innocent persons, as some of themselves say more than are alive in Europe in any one age. And this savage cruelty hath made the name of Christians detestable amongst all that remained of them, that had any exercise of reason; some few slavish brutes being brought by force to submit unto this new kind of idolatry. And this we must think to be done, in obedience unto that command of Christ, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' This is the deformed image, which they have set up of obedience unto his holy commands, whereunto they apply that voice to Peter with respect unto the eating of all sorts of creatures, 'Arise, Peter, kill and eat.' So have they dealt with those poor nations whom they have devoured. But blood, murder, and unjust war (as all war is for the propagation of religion), with persecution, began in Cain, who derived it from the devil, that

murderer from the beginning; for he was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. Jesus Christ the Son of God was 'manifest to destroy these works of the devil;' Heb. ii. [1 John iii. 18.] And he doth it in this world by his word and doctrine, judging and condemning them. And he does it in his disciples by his Spirit, extirpating them out of their minds, hearts, and ways; so as that there is not a more assured character of a derivation from the evil spirit, than force and blood in religion for the propagating of it.

(2.) The next part of this image, the next way used by them for the propagating of the faith, and the conversion of them they call heretics, is the inquisition. So much hath been declared, and is known thereof, that it is needless here to give a portraiture of it. It may suffice, that it hath been long since opened like Cacus's den, and discovered to be the greatest arsenal of cruelty, the most dreadful shambles of blood and slaughter, that ever was in the world. This is that engine, which hath supplied the scarlet whore with the blood of saints, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, until she was drunk with it. And this is the second way, or means whereby they propagate the faith of the gospel, and endeavour, as they say, the conversion of the souls of men. This is the second part of that image which they have set up instead of the holy appointment of Jesus Christ.

(3.) The third way they insist on unto this purpose, the third part of this image, consists in plots and contrivances to murder princes, to embroil nations in blood, to stir up sedition unto their ruin, inveigling and alluring all sorts of vicious, indigent, ambitious persons, into an association with them, so to introduce the Catholic religion in the places which they design to subvert. This engine for the propagation of the faith, hath been plied with various successes in many nations of Europe, and is still at work unto the same purpose. And hereunto belong all the arts which they use for the infatuation of the minds of princes and great men, all the baits they lay for others of all sorts to work them over unto a compliance with their designs.

Of these parts, I say, is that dreadful image made up and composed, which they set up, embrace, and adore, in

the room of the holy way for the propagation of the gospel appointed by Jesus Christ. In his way they can see no beauty, they can expect no success; they cannot believe that ever the world will be converted by it, or be brought in subjection unto the pope, and therefore betake themselves unto their own. Faith, prayer, holiness, preaching, suffering, all in expectation of the promised presence and assistance of Christ, are no ways for efficacy, success, and advantage, to be compared unto the sword, inquisition, and underhand designings. And this also is that which they call zeal for the glory of God, and the honour of Christ; another deformed image which they have brought into religion. For whereas that grace consists principally in postponing self, and all self-concerns, with an undervaluation of them, unto the glory of God, and the special duties whereby it may be promoted, this impious design to destroy mankind by all ways of subtlety, and cruelty, unto their own advantage, is set up in the room of it. But the consideration of the nature and spirit, of the use and end of the gospel, of the design of Christ in it, and by it, is sufficient to preserve the souls of men not utterly infatuated, in an abhorrency of this image of its propagation. It is that wherein the God of this world, by the help of their blindness and lusts, hath put a cheat on mankind, and prevailed with them, under a pretence of doing Christ honour, to make the vilest representation of him to the world, that can be conceived. If he hath appointed this way for the propagating of the gospel, he cannot well be distinguished from Mahomet; but there is nothing more contrary unto him, nothing that his holy soul doth more abhor. And had not men lost all spiritual sense of the nature and ends of the gospel, they could never have given up themselves unto these abominations. For any to suppose that the faith of the gospel is to be propagated by such cruelty and blood, by art and subtlety, by plots, conspiracies, and contrivances, any way but by the foolishness of preaching, which unto that end, is the power and wisdom of God, is to declare his own ignorance of it, and unconcernment in it. And had not men conceived and embraced another religion, than what is taught therein, or abused a pretence thereof unto ends and advantages of their

own, this imagination of the propagation of it, had never taken place in their minds, it is so diametrically opposite unto the whole nature, and all the ends of it.

9. There is yet amongst them another image of a general principle, no less horrid than that before mentioned, and that with respect unto religious obedience. It is the great foundation of all religion, and in especial of Christian religion, that God in all things is to be obeyed absolutely and universally.

Of all our obedience, there is no other reason, but that it is his will, and is known unto us so to be. This follows necessarily from the infinite perfections of the divine nature. As the first essential verity he is to be believed in what he reveals above, and against all contradiction from pretended reasons, or any imaginations whatever; and as he is the only absolute independent being, essential goodness, and the sovereign Lord of all things, he is without farther reason, motive, or inducement, to be absolutely obeyed in all his commands. An instance whereof we have in Abraham offering his only son without dispute or hesitation, in compliance with a divine revelation and command.

It will seem very difficult to frame an image hereof amongst men, with whom there is not the least shadow of these divine perfections, namely, essential verity, and absolute sovereignty, in conjunction with infinite wisdom and goodness, which alone renders such an obedience lawful, useful, or suitable unto the principles of our rational natures: but these of whom we speak, have not been wanting unto themselves herein, especially the principal craftmen of this image trade. The order of the Jesuits have made a bold attempt for the framing of it. Their vow of blind obedience (as they call it) unto their superiors, whereto they resign the whole conduct of their souls, in all the concernments of religion, in all duties toward God and man, unto their guidance and disposal, is a cursed image of this absolute obedience unto the commands of God, which he requireth of us. Hence the founder of their order, was not ashamed in his epistle 'ad fratres Lusitanos,' to urge and press this blind obedience from the example of Abraham yielding obedience unto God, without debate or consideration; as if the superiors of the order were good, and not evil and sinful men.

Whilst this honour was reserved unto God, whilst this was judged to be his prerogative alone, namely, that his commands are to be obeyed in all things, without reasonings and examinations as unto the matter, justice, and equity of them, merely because they are his, which absolutely and infallibly conclude them good, holy, and just, the righteous government of the world, and the security of men in all their rights, was safely provided for; for he neither will nor can command any thing but what is holy, just, and good. But since the ascription of such a god-like authority unto man, as to secure blind obedience unto all their commands, innumerable evils, in murders, seditions, and perjuries, have openly ensued thereon. But besides those particular evils in matter of fact, which have proceeded from this corrupt fountain, this persuasion at once takes away all grounds of peace and security from mankind; for who knows what a crew or sort of men, called the Jesuits' superiors, known only by their restless ambition, and evil practices in the world, may command their vassals, who are sworn to execute whatever they command, without any consideration whether it be right or wrong, good or evil?

Let princes and other great men flatter themselves whilst they please, that on one consideration or other, they shall be the objects only of their kindness, if these men, according to their profession, be obliged in conscience to execute whatever their superiors shall command them, no less than Abraham was to sacrifice his son on the command of God; they hold their lives at the mercy, and on the good nature of these superiors, who are always safe out of the reach of revenge. It is marvellous that mankind doth not agree to demolish this cursed image, or the ascription of a god-like power unto men, to require blind obedience unto their commands, especially considering what effects it hath produced in the world. All men know by whose device it was first set up and erected; by whom, what means, and unto what end it was confirmed and consecrated; and at this day it is maintained by a society of men, of an uncertain extract and original, like that of the Janizaries in the Turkish empire, their rise being generally out of obscurity, among the meanest and lowest of the people. Such they are who by the rules of their education, are taught to renounce all re-

spect unto their native countries, and alliances therein, but so as to make them only the way and matter for the advancement of the interest of this new society. And this sort of men being nourished from their very first entrance into the conduct of the society, unto hopes and expectations of wealth, honour, power, interest in the disposal of all public affairs of mankind and the regulation of the consciences of men, it is no wonder if with the utmost of their arts and industry, they endeavour to set up and preserve this image which they have erected, from whence they expect all the advantage which they do design. But hereof I may treat more fully, when I come to speak of the image of jealousy itself.

10. From these generals, I shall proceed unto more particular instances; and those for the most part in important principles of religion, wherein Christian faith and practice are most concerned. And I shall begin with that which is of signal advantage unto the framers of these images, as the other also are in their degree; for by this craft they have their livelihood and wealth, and most pernicious to the souls of other men. It is a principle of truth, and that such as wherein the whole course of Christian obedience is concerned, that there is a spiritual defilement in sin.

This the Scripture everywhere declares, representing the very nature of it by spiritual uncleanness. And this uncleanness is its contrariety unto the holiness of the divine nature, as represented unto us in the law. This defilement is in all men equally by nature; all are alike born in sin, and the pollution of it; 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' And it is in all personally, in various degrees; some are more polluted with actual sins than others, but all are so in their degree and measure. This pollution of sin must be purged and taken away before our entrance into heaven; for no unclean thing shall enter into the kingdom of God. Sin must be destroyed in its nature, practice, power, and defects, or we are not saved from it. This purification of sin is wrought in us initially and gradually in this life, and accomplished in death, when the spirits of just men are made perfect. In a compliance with this work of God's grace towards them, whereby they purify themselves, consists one principal part of the obedience of believers in this world,

and of the exercise of their faith. The principal, internal, immediate, efficient cause of this purification of sins, is the blood of Christ; the 'blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God, cleanseth us from all our sins;' 1 John i. 7. 'The blood of Jesus purgeth our consciences from dead works;' Heb. ix. 14. 'He washeth us in his own blood;' Rev. i. 5. And there is an external helping cause thereof, which is trials and afflictions, made effectual by the word, and accomplished in death.

But this way of purging sins by the blood of Christ is mysterious: there is no discerning of its glory but by spiritual light, no experience of its power, but by faith. Hence it is despised and neglected by the most that yet outwardly profess the doctrine of the gospel. Men generally think there are a thousand better ways for the purging of sin, than this by the blood of Christ, which they cannot understand; see Micah vi. 6, 7. It is mysterious in the application of it unto the souls and consciences of believers by the Holy Ghost; it is so in the spring of its efficacy, which is the oblation of it, for a propitiation, and in its relation unto the new covenant, which first it establisheth, and then makes effectual unto this end. The work of it is gradual and imperceptible unto any thing but the eyes of faith, and diligent spiritual experience.

Again, it is so ordered by divine wisdom, as strictly to require, to begin, excite, and encourage, the utmost diligence of believers in a compliance with its efficacy unto the same end. What Christ did for us, he did without us, without our aid or concurrence. As God made us without ourselves, so Christ redeemed us; but what he doth in us, he doth also by us; what he works in a way of grace, we work in a way of duty: and our duty herein consists as in the continual exercise of all gracious habits, renewing, changing, and transforming the soul into the likeness of Christ (for he who hopes to see him, purifieth himself as he is pure), so also in universal, permanent, uninterrupted mortification unto the end, whereof we shall speak afterward. This also renders the work both mysterious and difficult. The improvement of afflictions unto the same end, is a principal part of the wisdom of faith; without which they can be of no spiritual use unto the souls of men.

This notion of the defilement of sin, and that of the necessity of its purification, were retained in the church of Rome; for they could not be lost, without not only a rejection of the Scripture, but the stifling of natural conceptions about them, which are indelibly fixed in the consciences of men. But spiritual light into the glory of the thing itself, or the mystical purification of sin, with an experience of the power and efficacy of the blood of Christ, as applied unto the consciences of believers unto that end, by the Holy Ghost, were lost amongst them. In vain shall we seek for any thing of this nature, either in their doctrine or their practice. Wherefore having lost the substance of this truth, and all experience of its power, to retain the use of its name, they have made sundry little images of it, creeping things, whereunto they ascribe the power of purging sin; such as holy water, pilgrimages, disciplines, masses, and various commutations. But they quickly found by experience, that these things would neither purify the heart, nor pacify the consciences of sinners, any more than the blood of bulls and of goats could do it under the law; yea, any more than the lustrations and expiations of sin amongst the heathen could effect it. Wherefore they have at length formed a more stated and specious image of it, to serve all the turns of convinced sinners; and this is a purgatory after this life; that is, a subterraneous place, and various means where, and whereby, the souls of men are purged from all their sins, and made meet for heaven, when the Lord Christ thinks meet to send for them, or the pope judges it fit to send them to him. Hereunto, let them pretend what they please, the people under their conduct do trust a thousand times more for the purging of their sins, than unto the blood of Christ: but it is only a cursed image of the virtue of it, set up to draw off the minds of poor sinners from seeking an interest in a participation of the efficacy of that blood for that end, which is to be obtained by faith alone; Rom. iii. 25. Only they have placed this image behind the curtain of mortality, that the cheat of it might not be discovered; none, who find themselves deceived by it, can come back to complain or warn others to take care of themselves; and it was in an especial manner suited unto their delusion, who lived in pleasures, or in the pursuit of unjust gain, without exercise

of afflictions in this world. From these two sorts of persons, by this engine they raised a revenue unto themselves, beyond that of kings or princes; for all the endowments of their religious houses and societies, were but commutations for the abatement of the fire of this purgatory. But whereas in itself it was a rotten post that could not stand or subsist, they were forced to prop it with many other imaginations; for unto this end to secure work for this purgatory, they coined the distinction of sin into mortal and venial; not as unto their end, with respect unto faith and repentance, nor as unto the degrees of sin with respect unto the aggravations, but as unto the nature of them; some of them being such, namely, those that are venial, as were capable of a purging expiation after this life, though men die without any repentance of them. And when this was done, they have cast almost all the sins that can be named under this order; and hereon this image is become an engine to disappoint the whole doctrine of the gospel, and to precipitate secure sinners into eternal ruin. And to strengthen this deceiving security, they have added another invention of a certain storehouse of ecclesiastical merits, the keys whereof are committed to the pope, to make application of them as he sees good unto the ease and relief of them that are in this purgatory. For whereas many of their church and communion have, as they say, done more good works than were needful for their salvation (which they have received upon a due balance of commutative justice), the surplusage is committed to the pope, to commute with it for the punishment of their sins, who are sent into purgatory to suffer for them; than which they could have found out no engine more powerful, to evacuate the efficacy of the blood of Christ, both as offered and as sprinkled, and therewith the doctrine of the gospel concerning faith and repentance. Moreover, to give it farther countenance (as one lie must be thatched with another, or it will quickly rain through), they have fancied a separation to be made between guilt and punishment, so as that when the guilt is fully remitted and pardoned, yet there may punishment remain on the account of sin. For this is the case of them in purgatory; their sins are pardoned, so as that the guilt of them shall not bind them over to eternal damnation, though 'the wages of sin

is death,' yet they must be variously punished for the sins that are forgiven. But as this is contradictory in itself, it being utterly impossible there should be any punishment properly so called, but where there is guilt as the cause of it, so it is highly injurious both to the grace of God and blood of Christ, in procuring and giving out such a lame pardon of sins, as should leave room for punishment next to that which is eternal. These are some of the rotten props which they have fixed on the minds of persons credulous and superstitious, terrified with guilt and darkness, to support this tottering deformed image, set up in the room of the efficacy of the blood of Christ, to purge the souls and consciences of believers from sin. But that whereby it is principally established and kept up, is the darkness, ignorance, guilt, fear, terror of conscience, accompanied with a love of sin, that the most among them are subject and obnoxious unto, being disquieted, perplexed, and tormented with these things, and utterly ignorant of the true and only way of their removal and deliverance from them, they greedily embrace this sorry provision for their present ease and relief, being accommodated unto the utmost that human or diabolical craft can extend unto, to abate their fear, ease their torments, and to give security unto their superstitious minds. And hereby it is become to be the life and soul of their religion, diffusing itself into all the parts and concerns of it, more trusted unto than either God, or Christ, or the gospel.

Spiritual light and experience, with the consequents of them in peace with God, will safeguard the minds of believers from bowing down to this horrid image, though the acknowledgments of its divinity should be imposed on them with craft and force, otherwise it will not be done; for without this, there will a strong inclination and disposition, arising from a mixture of superstitious fear and love of sin, possess the minds of men to close with this pretended relief and satisfaction. The foundation of our preservation herein lies in spiritual light, or an ability of mind, from supernatural illumination, to discern the beauty, glory, and efficacy of the purging of our sins by the blood of Christ; when the glory of the wisdom and grace of God, of the love and grace of Christ, of the power of the Holy Ghost herein, is made manifest unto us, we shall despise all the paintings of this

invention, Dagon will fall before the ark; and all these things do gloriously shine forth and manifest themselves unto believers in this mysterious way of purging all our sins by the blood of Christ. Hereon will ensue an experience of the efficacy of this heavenly truth in our own souls. There is no man whose heart and ways are cleansed by the blood of Christ, through the effectual application of it by the Holy Spirit, in the ordinance of the gospel, but he hath or may have a refreshing experience of it in his own soul, and by the power which is communicated therewith, he is stirred up unto all that exercise of faith, and all those duties of obedience, whereby the work of purifying and cleansing the whole person may be carried on toward perfection: see 2 Cor. vii. 1. 1 Thess. v. 23. 1 John iii. 3. And he who is constantly engaged in that work with success, will see the folly and vanity of any other pretended way for the purging of sins here or hereafter. The consequent of these things is peace with God, for they are assured pledges of our justification and acceptance with him, and being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and where this is attained by the gospel, the whole fabric of purgatory falls to the ground, for it is built on these foundations, that no assurance of the love of God, or of a justified state, can be obtained in this life: for if it may be so, there can be no use of purgatory. This then will assuredly keep the souls of believers in a contempt of that which is nothing but a false relief for sinners, under disquietment of mind for want of peace with God.

11. Some other instances of the same abomination I shall yet mention, but with more brevity, and sundry others must at present be passed over without a discovery. It is the known method of gospel faith and obedience, the way of God's dealing with believers in the covenant of grace, that after their initiation and implantation into Christ, they should labour to thrive and grow in grace, by its continual exercise, until they come to be strengthened and confirmed therein. And this in the ordinary way of God's dealing with the church, they shall never fail of, unless it be through their own neglect: for there are many divine promises to this purpose, and it lies in the nature of the things themselves: for the seeds of grace are of that kind of habits, which will be increased and strengthened by exercise. Wherefore this con-

firmation in grace, is that whereof believers have a blessed experience.

This truth in general of an implantation into Christ, and the ensuing confirmation in grace, is universally assented unto, none can deny it, without denying the whole doctrine of the gospel. But the sense and experience of it was lost amongst them of whom we treat; yet would they not forego the profession of the principle itself, which would have proclaimed them apostates from the grace of Christ: wherefore they formed an image of it, or images of both its distinct parts, which they could manage unto their own ends, and such as the carnal minds of men could readily comply with, and rest in. As in the other sacrament they turned the outward signs into the things signified; so in this of baptism, they make it to stand in the stead of the thing itself, which is to make it, if not an idol, yet an image of it. The outward participation of that ordinance with them is regeneration, and implantation into Christ, without any regard unto the internal grace that is signified thereby; so that which in itself is a sacred figure, is made an image to delude the souls of men.

And that which they would impose in the room of spiritual confirmation in grace, is yet more strange. The image which they set up hereof is episcopal imposition of hands. When one that hath been baptized can answer some few questions out of a catechism, though he be very ignorant, and openly vicious in his conversation, by this laying on of hands he is confirmed in grace.

It may be some will say, there is no great matter one way or other in things of this sort; they may be suffered to pass at what rate they will in this world. I confess I am not so minded. If there be any thing in them but mere formality and custom, if they are trusted unto as the things whose names they bear, they are pernicious unto the souls of men: for if all that are outwardly baptized, should thereon judge themselves implanted into Christ, without regard unto the internal washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; and all who have had this imposition of hands, should without more ado, suppose themselves confirmed in grace, they are in the ready way to eternal ruin.

12. It is granted among all Christians, that all our helps,

our relief, our deliverance from sin, Satan, and the world, are from Christ alone.

This is included in all his relations unto the church, in all his offices, and the discharge of them; and is the express doctrine of the gospel. It is no less generally acknowledged, at least the Scripture is no less clear and positive in it, that we receive and derive all our supplies of relief from Christ by faith, other ways of the participation of any thing from him, the Scripture knoweth not. Wherefore it is our duty on all occasions to apply ourselves unto him by faith, for all supplies, reliefs, and deliverances: but these men can find no life nor power herein, at least if they grant that somewhat might be done this way, yet they know not how to do it, being ignorant of the life of faith, and the due exercise of it. They must have a way more ready and easy, exposed to the capacities and abilities of all sorts of persons good and bad, yea, that will serve the turn of the worst of men unto these ends. An image therefore must be set up for common use, instead of this spiritual application unto Christ for relief, and this is the making of the sign of the cross. Let a man but make the sign of the cross on his forehead, his breast, or the like, which he may as easily do as take up or cast away a straw, and there is no more required to engage Christ unto his assistance at any time. And the virtues which they ascribe hereunto are innumerable, but this also is an idol, a teacher of lies, invented and set up for no other end, but to satisfy the carnal minds of men, with a presumptuous supposition, in the neglect of the spiritually laborious exercise of faith; an experience of the work of faith in the derivation of all supplies of spiritual life, grace, and strength, with deliverance and supplies from Jesus Christ, will secure believers from giving heed unto this trifling deceit.

13. One thing more amongst many others of the same sort may be mentioned. It is a notion of truth which derives from the light of nature, That those who approach unto God in divine worship, should be careful that they be pure and clean, without any offensive defilements.

This the heathens themselves give testimony unto, and God confirmed it in the institutions of the law. But what are these defilements and pollutions which make us unmeet

to approach unto the presence of God, how and by what means we may be purified and cleansed from them, the gospel alone declares. And it doth, in opposition unto all other ways and means of it, plainly reveal, that it is by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon our consciences, so to purge them from 'dead works, that we may serve the living God:' see Heb. ix. 14. x. 19—21. But this is a thing mysterious, nothing but spiritual light and saving faith can direct us herein. Men destitute of them could never attain an experience of purification in this way. Wherefore they retained the notion of truth itself, but made an image of it for their use, with a neglect of the thing itself. And this was the most ludicrous that could be imagined; namely, the sprinkling of themselves and others with that they call holy water, when they go into the places of sacred worship; which yet also they borrowed from the Pagans; so stupid and sottish are the minds of men, so dark and ignorant of heavenly things, that they have suffered their souls to be deceived and ruined by such vain superstitious trifles.

This discourse hath already proceeded unto a greater length than was at first intended; and would be so much more, should we look into all parts of this chamber of imagery, and expose to view all the abominations in it. I shall therefore put a close unto it, in one or two instances, wherein the church of Rome doth boast itself as retaining the truth and power of the gospel in a peculiar manner, whereas in very deed they have destroyed them, and set up corrupt images of their own, in their stead.

14. The first of these is the doctrine and grace of mortification.

That this is not only an important evangelical duty, but also of indispensable necessity unto salvation, all who have any thing of Christian religion in themselves must acknowledge. It is also clearly determined in the Scripture, both what is the nature of it, with its causes, and in what acts and duties it doth consist. For it is frequently declared to be the crucifying of the body of sin with all the lusts thereof. For mortification must be the bringing of something to death; and this is sin, and the dying of sin consists in the casting out of all vicious habits and inclinations, arising from the original depravation of nature; it is the weakening and gra-

duate extirpation, or destruction of them, in their roots, principles, and operations: whereby the soul is set at liberty to act universally from the contrary principle of spiritual life and grace. The means on the part of Christ, whereby this is wrought and effected in believers, is the communication of his Spirit unto them, to make an effectual application of the virtue of his death, unto the death of sin; for it is by his Spirit that we mortify the deeds of the flesh, and the flesh itself, and that as we are implanted by him into the likeness of the death of Christ. By virtue thereof, we are crucified, and made dead unto sin; in the declaration of which things the Scripture doth abound. The means of it on the part of believers, is the exercise of faith in Christ, as crucified; whereby they derive virtue from him, for the crucifying of the body of death: and this exercise of faith is always accompanied with diligence and perseverance in all holy duties of prayer, with fasting, godly sorrow, daily renewed repentance, with a continual watch against all the advantages of sin. Herein consists principally that spiritual warfare and conflict that believers are called unto, this is all the killing work which the gospel requires. That of killing other men for religion, is of a latter date, and another original. And there is nothing in the way of their obedience, wherein they have more experience of the necessity, power, and efficacy, of the graces of the gospel.

This principle of truth concerning the necessity of mortification is retained in the church of Rome; yea, she pretends highly unto it, above any other Christian society. The mortification of their devotionists, is one of the principal arguments which they plead to draw unwary souls over unto their superstition. Yet in the height of their pretences unto it, they have lost all experience of its nature, with the power and efficacy of the grace of Christ therein, and have, therefore, framed an image of it unto themselves. For,

(1.) They place the eminency and height of it in a monastical life, and pretended retirement from the world. But this may be, hath been, in all or the most, without the least real work of mortification in their souls: for there is nothing required in the strictest rules of these monastic votaries, but may be complied withal, without the least effectual operation of the Holy Spirit in their minds, in the applica-

tion of the virtue of the death of Christ unto them; besides, the whole course of life which they commend under this name, is neither appointed in, nor approved by, the gospel. And some of those who have been most renowned for their severities therein, were men of blood, promoting the cruel slaughter of multitudes of Christians upon the account of their profession of the gospel, in whom there could be no one evangelical grace; for no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

(2.) The ways and means which they prescribe and use for the attaining of it, are such as are no way directed by the divine wisdom of Christ in the Scripture; such as multiplied confessions to priests, irregular ridiculous fastings, penances, self-macerations of the body, unlawful vows, self-devised rules of discipline and habits, with the like trinkets innumerable. Hence, whatever their design be, they may say of it in the issue, what Aaron said of his idol, 'I cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf:' they have brought forth only an image of mortification, diverting the minds of men from seeking after that which is really and spiritually so. And under this pretence, they have formed a state and condition of life, that hath filled the world with all manner of sins and wickedness; and many of those who have attained unto some of the highest degrees of this mortification, on their principles, and by the means designed unto that end, have been made ready thereby for all sorts of wickedness.

Wherefore, the mortification which they retain, and whereof they boast, is nothing but a wretched image of that which is truly so, substituted in its room, and embraced by such, as had never attained any experience of the nature or power of gospel-grace in the real mortification of sin.

15. The same is to be said concerning good works; the second evangelical duty whereof they boast.

The necessity of these good works unto salvation, according unto men's opportunities and abilities, is acknowledged by all. And the glory of our profession in this world, consisteth in our abounding in them; but their principle, their nature, their motives, their use, their ends are declared and limited in the Scripture, whereby they are distinguished from what may seem materially the same, in those which

may be wrought by unbelievers. In brief, they are the acts and duties of true believers only; and they are in them effects of divine grace, or the operation of the Holy Ghost; for they 'are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath ordained, that they should walk in them.' But the principal mystery of their glory, which the Scripture insists upon, is, that although they are necessary, as a means unto the salvation of believers, yet are they utterly excluded from any influence unto the justification of sinners; so there was never any work evangelically good, performed by any, who were not before freely justified.

Unto these good works, those with whom we have to do, lay a vehement claim, as though they were the only patrons of them, and pleaders for them: but they have also excluded them out of Christian religion, and set up a deformed image of them, in defiance of God, of Christ, and the gospel: for the works they plead for, are such, as so far proceed from their own free will, as to render them meritorious in the sight of God. They have confined them partly unto acts of superstitious devotion, partly unto those of charity, and principally unto those that are not so; such are the building of monasteries, nunneries, and such pretended religious houses, for the maintenance of swarms of monks and friars, filling the world with superstition and debauchery. They make them meritorious, satisfactory, yea, some of them, which they call of supererrogation, above all that God requireth of us, and the causes of our justification before God. They ascribe unto them a condignity of the heavenly reward, making it of works, and so not of grace, with many other defiling imaginations; but whatever is done from these principles, and for these ends, is utterly foreign unto those good works which the gospel enjoineth, as a part of our new or evangelical obedience. But having, as in other cases, lost all sense and experience of the power and efficacy of the grace of Christ, in working believers unto this duty of obedience, unto the glory of God, and benefit of mankind, they have set up the image of them, in defiance of Christ, his grace, and his gospel.

These are some of the abominations which are pourtrayed on the walls of the chamber of imagery in the church of Rome; and more will be added in the consideration of the

image of jealousy itself, which, God willing, shall ensue in another way. These are the shadows which they bet ke themselves unto, in the loss of spiritual light to discern the truth and glory of the mystery of the gospel, and the want of an experience of their power and efficacy unto all the ends of the life of God, in their own minds and souls. And although they are all of them expressly condemned in the letter of the Scripture, which is sufficient to secure the minds of true believers from the admission of them, yet their establishment against all pleas, pretences, and force, for a compliance with them, depends on their experience of the power of every gospel truth unto its proper end, in communicating unto us the grace of God, and transforming our minds into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

SERMON XVII.*

SEASONABLE WORDS

FOR

ENGLISH PROTESTANTS.

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* This sermon was preached at a Fast, Dec. 22, 1681.

PREFACE.

To the Reader,

Upon the desire of some, interested in the publication of this sermon, I have perused it, and do communicate these my thoughts concerning it.

There appears unto me in it those two things, which do above all others commend any sermon, or any other book; namely, most weighty and seasonable argument, with very judicious and methodical management.

If I am able to judge, the management speaks, 'arma virumque,' the man and his furniture. And it is like its great author, well known to this age, and like to be so unto future ones, by his writings in more than one language. There is a favour due unto all posthumous pieces, of which sort this is; but there is little need that this piece seems to have of it.

As for its argument, it is very salvation; and that not merely personal, or domestical, but national. This, if any thing, will be acknowledged momentous; and now, if ever, it must be acknowledged seasonable. Now, in this our day, 'known only to the Lord.' Nay now, that it is neither day nor night, as the prophet speaks. Now that city and country are crying, 'watchman, what of the night? watchman, what of the night?' Now, that the three frightful signs of approaching night are so upon us; I mean, shadows growing long, labourers going apace home, and wild beasts going boldly abroad. 'Quis talia fando temperet à lachrymis?'

In a word, here is that which will sufficiently recommend itself to all serious readers. It is the com-

plaint of many, that our booksellers' shops are become heaps of dry sand, in which many a rich stone is lost. But it is known to all, that diamonds will be found out by their own lustre. And I make no great question but so this sermon will be. That it may be so, and may go much abroad, and do good wherever it comes, is the prayer of

Thy servant in Christ Jesus,
D. BURGESS.

From my house in Bridges Street, in Covent Garden, Aug. 7, 1690.

SERMON XVII.

For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts, though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.—Jer. li. 5.

This chapter, and the foregoing, are an eminent prophecy and prediction of the destruction of Babylon, and of the land of the Chaldeans, of the metropolitical city of the empire, and of the nation itself. There is a double occasion for the inserting of these words. The first is to declare the grounds and reasons, why God would bring that destruction upon Babylon, and upon the land of the Chaldeans. The words of ver. 4. are, 'The slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and they that are thrust through in her streets.' Why so? For, saith he, 'Israel hath not been forsaken.' The reason why God will destroy the empire of Babylon is, because he will remember Israel, and what they have done against him. This lies in store for another Babylon in God's appointed time. The second reason is, that it may be for the comfort, for the supportment of Israel and Judah, under that distress which was then befalling them, upon the entrance of this Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans. Notwithstanding all, saith he, yet 'Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah of his God.'

We are called this day to join our cries with the nation in the behalf of the land of our nativity. And though it hath been, as most of you know, my constant course on such solemn days as these are, to treat in particular about our own sins, our own decays, our own means of recovery; yet, upon this occasion I shall, as God shall help me, from these words, represent unto you the state of the nation wherein we live, and the only way and means for our deliverance from universal destruction. To declare our interest herein, some things must be observed concerning this Babylon, whose destruction is so solemnly prophesied of in this and the foregoing chapter; and I must observe three things concerning it.

1. That Babylon was the original of apostacy from the natural worship of God unto idolatry in the whole world.

There was great iniquity before the flood, but no mention of any idolatry. There was a natural worship of God throughout the world, that was not corrupted with idolatry. There is no mention of it until the building of Babel. There it began: the tower which they built, they turned into a temple of Belus, whom they had made a god, and laid his image in the top of it. There was the original. You shall see immediately how we are concerned. There was the original of apostacy from natural worship unto idolatry.

2. Their idolatry. The idolatry that there began, consisted in image worship, in the worshipping of graven images, which was their idolatry, that they set up with respect unto men departed, whom they worshipped by them. Four times in this prophecy doth God say, he will 'take vengeance on their graven images.' And from Isa. xl. to the end of xlvi. you have a description of the idolatry of Babylon, that it all consisted in making carved idols, and graven images. The rest of the world, especially of the eastern nations, fell into the worshipping of the sun, which they called Baal, and Moloch, and Kemosh, all names of the sun; and the worship of the moon, which they called Ashtaroth, and the queen of heaven; but the idolatry of Babylon was by graven images and idols.

3. They were, so far as appears upon record, the first state in the world, that ever persecuted for religion, that oppressed the true worshippers of God, as such, as being 'mad upon their idols,' as the prophet saith they were, they were inflamed upon them. They were the first that oppressed the church, because of its worshipping of God, and destroyed that worship among them. Hence the church prays in this chapter, 'The vengeance of the Lord, and of his temple be upon Babylon:' not only the vengeance of the Lord, for destroying of his people; but the vengeance of his temple, for destroying of his worship, be upon Babylon, shall Zion say. 'Others have afflicted me,' saith he in the same chapter, 'but this Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon hath broken my bones.' They were the great oppressors of the church.

Upon these three accounts, which is that I would observe, the name of Babylon, and all that is spoken of it in the Old Testament, is transferred to the apostate church of

Rome in the New, and all applied unto it in the Book of the Revelation, and that upon this great analogy, which I shall now briefly shew.

Why doth God call the apostate state of the church under the New Testament, 'Babylon, Babylon, the Mystery?' For these three reasons:

(1.) As old Babylon was the rise and spring of apostacy from natural worship in the world unto idolatry, so this new Babylon was the rise and spring of apostacy from evangelical worship in the world unto idolatry. Mark the analogy. Hence she is called, 'the mother of harlots:' that is, she that had brought forth all the idolatrous churches and worship that were in the world. Did Babylon begin to apostatize into idolatry from natural worship? so Rome began to apostatize into idolatry from spiritual evangelical worship. Therefore the Holy Ghost calls her Babylon.

(2.) The peculiar idolatry of Babylon consisted in image worship, the worshipping of men departed under images made to their likeness. And the peculiar idolatry of Rome consists in image worship, the worshipping saints departed, which is a great part of their idolatry. And therein they are Babylon also.

(3.) As Babylon was the spring of all persecution against, and oppression of, the church of God, under the Old Testament; so Rome hath been the spring of all persecution, and oppression of the church of God since the apostacy, under the New Testament.

On these accounts hath the Holy Ghost in infinite wisdom transferred over the name, and state, and other things spoken of Babylon from the old unto the new.

I have mentioned this, that you may see the interest of England in this text of Scripture. So far as the truth of religion is owned in this nation, so far as there is a testimony given against idolatry, we are to God as Israel and Judah, though the land be filled with sin. At the time of this prophecy Israel and Judah were in danger of present destruction and desolation from the old Babylon; and if we do not mock God in all we do, we are under apprehensions that England and the church of God in England, is under danger of the same desolation and destruction from new Babylon.

upon the same account and principle. If we do not mock God, that is that we profess at this day. Wherefore the parallel runs thus far equal. Such as was Babylon of old, such is that at present: such as was the danger of Israel and Judah from them at that day, such is the danger of England from the new at this present. This is spoken in general.

For the opening of the words observe these three things:

First, That there is in them a reduplication of the names or titles of God. He is in this verse called by the name of 'the Lord of hosts,' and by the name of 'the Holy One of Israel.' Where there are such reduplications of the name of God, or any of his titles, the Holy Ghost would have us take notice, that it is a matter of great importance whereof he speaks.

Secondly, There is a distribution and application of these names of God unto distinct occasions suitable unto them.

1. There is in it mentioned an intimation of a surprisal with some protection or deliverance. Who shall it be done by? 'The Lord of hosts,' saith he, 'the Lord his God.' And he doth not in vain add immediately, 'The Lord of hosts,' that title of God. He who hath the host above, and the host below in his sovereign disposal. God's host above are all the holy angels, and all the heavenly bodies in their influences. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera; and he hath lately hung forth among us a flag or ensign of his host above, intimating that he is arising in his indignation, as 'the Lord of hosts,' and hath hung forth an ensign before his coming, full of dread and terror. And he is 'the Lord of hosts' here below, of all men, and of all creatures, disposing of them as seems good unto him. The prophet adds this name of God, because of the unspeakable greatness of the thing he mentions, namely, that Israel should not be forsaken, nor Judah, while the land was so filled with sin, and the whole interest of Babylon so coming upon them.

2. The other title of God is, 'The Holy One of Israel.' This is applied peculiarly unto their sin: 'The land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.' It is the greatest, it is the highest aggravation of sin, that it is against the holiness of God, 'who is a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.' So hath the wisdom of the Holy Ghost applied

these two distinct titles of God unto the two distinct considerations of the people; first, of their protection, that he is 'the Lord of hosts;' secondly, as of their sin, that he is 'the Holy One of Israel.'

Thirdly, The third thing is this: that in this woful state there is yet an intimation made of a covenant interest of Judah in God, and that God did yet own them as his in covenant. 'Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God.' Brethren, no man, I think, hath less of faith than I; no man doth more despond. But if I could see these two things in concurrence, 'his God,' and 'the Lord of hosts,' that is, sovereign grace, according to his covenant; and sovereign power, according to his providence; there is ground for any man's faith to build upon: 'his God, the Lord of hosts.' Nothing but sovereign grace and sovereign power can preserve a people, when their land is full of sin against the Holy One of Israel, and destruction seems to encompass them from the interest of Babylon.

I shall speak yet a little more particularly. You may consider in the words,

1. That which is mentioned in the last place; the state of the people at this time: 'Their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.'

2. An intimation of approaching deserved destruction on that account: 'Though the land:' it is in that condition that it ought to look for nothing but destruction.

3. A strange and wonderful surprisal, notwithstanding this, in sovereign grace and power: 'Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, the Lord of hosts.'

What shall I speak to is this.

Observation. When a land is filled with sin against the Lord, let men's hopes and expectations be what they will, they are in danger of utter destruction, and cannot be saved, but by the actings of sovereign grace and power.

I shall, for the handling hereof, at least I design to do these three things:

I. Shew when a land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.

II. Gather up what evidences we have, that England is not yet utterly forsaken of God.

III. Manifest what is indispensably required of us, that

we may not be given up unto that utter desolation and destruction, that lieth at the door.

I do believe that I am not in my thoughts far from your case, far from the case of the nation. I do not search for things to speak to, I shall speak only those, that are compliant with the common reason and understanding of all sober persons.

I. There are three ways whereby a land may be said to be filled with sin.

1. When the sins of a land or nation are come to the full, to the utmost measure that God hath allotted to them in his patience. There is such an allotment of patience to every nation under heaven, and when it comes to its appointed issue, no means under heaven can defer or delay their destruction one day. Thus saith God before the flood, 'The land is filled with sin, the whole earth with violence; a flood shall take them away:' the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah came up to God; they had filled up their measure; God sent fire and brimstone to destroy them. 'You shall not yet go into Canaan.' Why? 'The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' There is a time appointed, wherein the iniquity of the Amorites shall come up to its full measure, beyond which their destruction shall not be delayed. This was not now the case of Israel and Judah. It proved afterward to be their case, as the apostle describes it, 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16. 'Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary unto all men: forbidding us to preach to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.' How come? They have filled their measure, reached to their bounds: 'wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.' I hope, I pray that this is not, that this may not be the state of England; that our land is not so filled with sin, as that God's decree of absolute and universal desolation should be gone forth against us.

2. A land may be said to be filled with sin, when it is come to that degree and measure, as that God will not pass it by without some severe desolating judgment. He will not utterly forsake it, he will not utterly destroy it; but let all mankind do what they will, he will not pass it by without

some severe desolating judgment. Such was their case even at this time. You may see in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. 'But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.' It was impossible that the judgment of God should be turned away from them. In this state God saith, 'Pray not for this people; my heart shall not be towards them:' until he had brought his judgment upon them. 'Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, I will not hear them.' Ay, but what if reformation come in? Nay, nay, saith he, it is determined against them: reformation shall not save them. See 2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26. where there is an account given of the greatest reformation that ever was wrought in Judah, by Josiah. So it is said, 'Like unto him there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him:' having reformed the whole nation. Then sure all will be well. See the next words: 'Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah; and the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight.' There is a time and season when God, although he will not utterly destroy and forsake a nation for ever, yet he will not pass them by, until he hath brought a severe destructive scourge upon them. Whether this be the state of England at this day, or no, God only knows, and of mankind not one. Whether we are come to that state, wherein there is no remedy, wherein nothing we do shall prevent desolating judgments, I say, God only knows, and of men not one.

3. A land is filled with sin, when it is come to such a degree and measure, as that there is no rule of the word, nor any prognostic from providence, nor any conjecture from the state of things, that can give any determination what will be the issue. Judgment is deserved, and there is nothing remains but to look upon the balance, as it is held in the hand of sovereignty; which way it will turn, God only knows. The decree is not yet gone forth. In this your state God doth not say, 'Pray not for this people:'

God doth not say, 'Though you reform, I will not turn from the fierceness of my wrath:' but God saith, 'Who knows if God will return and leave a blessing? Who knows if God will be entreated and have mercy?' He leaves it upon the absolute pleasure of sovereignty to give us encouragement to wait upon him. Because I take this, yea, and I take it in the best of my hopes, to be that wherein we are concerned, pray take these two things along with you, before I go to shew it in particular. The first is, that in this state, if God gives time and space, there is encouragement enough left to make our applications to him for the removal of impending judgments. Methinks sometimes I see by faith the Lord high lift up upon his throne, and his train filling the temple with his glory, and holding the balance of this nation in his hand, and can turn it to mercy or judgment as seems good unto him. While it is so, while though 'the woman be put into the epha, yet the talent of lead is not laid upon her,' there is time for intercession, yet time for the interposition of God. And secondly, I say, and do you take it as you see good, but I will tell you my persuasion, that if there be not a compliance with the calls of God unto this nation, upon this suspension and arrest of judgment that we are under, we shall as certainly perish, as if we were in either of the two former conditions. If the Chaldeans were all wounded men, if there was no hope, no strength, no relief in the papal cause, they shall rise up and smite as in the day wherein 'Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel, and the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children;' Hos. x. 14. Unless there be a compliance with the calls of God in the days wherein we live.

Let us then a little, as God will give strength, inquire when a nation is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel, as certainly to put the balance into the hands of sovereignty, and to take off all rules and prognostics (which with great grief I have heard sometimes insisted upon), and reduce us merely to the hand of sovereignty. When is it that a land is so filled with sin?

(1.) A land is so filled with sin, when all sorts of provoking sins do abound in it; when there is no exception to be put into the indictment; when there is no provoking sin that can be thought on, that is not in the nation. For if

there be but one provoking sin absolutely excluded, there is room for mercy to dwell. Who now shall plead for England? Who shall put in an exception for England into this indictment? Oh poor England, among all thy lovers, thou hast not one to plead for thee this day! From the height of profaneness and atheism through the filthiness of sensuality and uncleanness, down to the lowest oppression and cheating, the land is filled with all sorts of sin. If there be any that can put in an exception, as to any provoking sin that is not among us, let them stand forth and plead the cause of this nation. I profess my mouth is stopped. 'The land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.' It is to no purpose to enumerate our sins; the roll is too long to be read at this time; and I am sorry it hath been cut, and thrown into the fire; when it hath been spoken of, contemned and despised, as Jeremiah's was by Jehoiakim. But so it is.

(2.) A land is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel, when all sorts of persons in a land are guilty of provoking sins. Pray mistake me not; I do not say, all persons of all sorts: God forbid. If it had been so, we had long since been like unto Sodom and Gomorrah. 'If the Lord of hosts had not left us a small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah;' Isa. i. 9. But whereas there are many sorts of persons, rulers, and them that are ruled; high and low, rich and poor; in court, in city, in country; I say, all sorts of persons have been guilty of these provoking sins: 'We, and our princes,' as Daniel speaks, and our rulers, and the people, the inhabitants of the land of all sorts. Who shall plead here for England? Who shall bring forth a sort of persons? nay, it is not so in the throne; nay, it is not so at court; nay, it is not so among the clergy; nay, it is not so in the city; nay, it is not so in the country; it is not so with the rich; it is not so with the poor. Let any one, that can, bring in a plea for this poor nation, that we may not conclude the land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.

But you will say, Here lies an exception: there are many persons, many churches free from these flagitious and provoking sins: there is a sort of persons, churches,

and professors, who walk in the fear of God, and are free from all these sins; and therefore it doth not extend to all sorts.

Brethren, you know my mind full well in this matter. I have been for these three last years upon all occasions inculcating it upon you. I acknowledge the churches in this nation are not guilty of those sins, whereby God is provoked against the nation to bring on national judgments: but I do say, that churches and professors in this nation are guilty of those sins, for which Christ will bring correcting judgments upon churches and professors; so that we are all in the same way and bottom, though not all upon the same account: 'The land is filled with sin.' How are your thoughts concerned in these things, brethren? I confess to you I speak my heart, my conscience, as in the presence of God, and as that which you are concerned to consider.

I have given you two evidences that this land is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. I will give you two more.

(3.) When the sins of a land have upon them the greatest aggravations that national sins are capable of. What are they? They are plain; they are against warnings, and against mercies; all sorts of sins in all sorts of persons; against all sorts of warnings, and against all sorts of mercies. God hath not left this land without warnings in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Was there no warning given us in the wasting, desolating plague? No warning in the consuming, raging fire? No warning in the bloody war that ensued thereon? No warning in all the prodigious appearances in heaven above, that we have had? None in that which at present hangs over us, as an ensign of God's supernal host? I acknowledge there hath been, I fear a weakness in one kind of warning by the public dispensation of the word. But God hath not left himself without witness: he hath multiplied warnings, and they have not been complied withal. Have they, brethren? 'Were they at all afraid,' saith Jeremiah, when the roll was read? Or, 'did they rent their clothes?' Jer. xxxvi. 24. No, not at all. Have these warnings of God been complied withal? Hath the voice of God in them been heard? Hath the nation been afraid? Have they rent their clothes and returned to

the Lord? They have not. We yet continue, God help us, in a state of sin against warnings. And as for mercies, the mercies of peace and plenty have been the food of lust, of covetousness and sensuality, and have pampered us in wantonness, to the rending and tearing one another.

(4.) When in the secret workings of God's providence there is an inclination in a sinful people unto a compliance with them, from whom their destruction is like to proceed; it is a sign that God is withdrawn from them, and that the land is so filled with sin. When Israel was to be destroyed by the Assyrian, when Israel saw his sickness, he sent to the king of Assyria, applied himself to the king of Assyria, by whom he was to be destroyed; Hos. v. 13. When Judah saw his sickness, all his inclinations and applications were unto the Babylonians and Chaldeans, by whom he was to be destroyed. The prophet Ezekiel hath a whole chapter to tell you of the fondness of that people upon the Babylonians before their destruction; Ezek. xxiii. 'They were all like princes and mighty men, and thou wast in love with them, and committed adultery with them;' that is, partook and complied with their idolatry. When it is so, it is evident that God is greatly withdrawn from such a people, and that they are nigh unto their desolation.

What shall we plead for England in this matter? Is it not known what wretched and vile compliances we have had with a neighbour nation, the French, following their manners, imitating their customs, promoting their interest, advancing their reputation, when every man almost among us talked of nothing but that we should be destroyed by the French? An eminent token of the hand of God upon us, and that the land is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. Nay, go farther, whence is it (for we bear ourselves herein not only upon the truth of the thing itself, but also upon the proclamation inviting us upon this day), whence is it, that we fear the judgments of God? Whence do we fear desolation, confusion, destruction upon this nation, to our religion, to our liberties, to our lives? Is it not from the papal interest? There is it stated by our rulers, and in the thoughts of all sober persons. And had we been wise, we might have seen it many years ago. But what have we been doing for some ages? Deserting our princi-

ples, forsaking the foundation we stood upon against the papacy, foregoing those avowed principles of the first reformers, pleading for compliance, pleading for a possibility of reconciliation, avowing them to be a true church. And in one word, if the power of the Protestant religion had not been preserved in the body of the people, it had by some been long ago given up to the papal interest, and this at a time working effectually among us when we were in dread, all that were wise and considerative, that there would from thence arise the desolation and destruction of this church.

I have given you these evidences, that this land of ours is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. And if they can answer it, and disprove it, no man shall more rejoice in it than myself.

I should in the next place shew the danger that land is in, when things lie in this equal balance. For I pray observe, I have not given these things to prove the land hath filled up its measure of iniquity, and must certainly be destroyed; I have not given them to prove absolutely that there is a decreed judgment that cannot be diverted, that there is no remedy, that notwithstanding reformation, God will say, 'I will not turn away the fierceness of mine anger:' but I have given them only to prove, that we are in that state and condition, wherein there is no certain rule of the word, no indication of providence, no rational consideration of the state of things, that can give us any security of protection, or deliverance; but that we are absolutely resolved upon sovereign grace and mercy, and without relief from thence, I shall only say, as to the proof of the proposition, what the prophet saith, Isa. xxxiv. 16. 'Seek ye out of the book of the Lord and read, not one of these things shall fail.'

To omit all the considerations, and all the proof I intended, that soverereign grace and mercy must be our relief, if ever we be relieved; I proceed unto the second thing, which is,

II. To give in evidences, that England is not yet utterly forsaken of the Lord its God, the Lord of hosts, though the land be thus filled with sin.

So that there is ground of encouragement yet remaining to apply ourselves to God. And in truth I will tell you the best I can think of.

1. The large and wonderful discovery of the horrible plot, of the horrible popish plot, laid for the ruin, destruction, and desolation of this nation, is an evidence that England is not yet, I say, utterly forsaken of the Lord its God. It was not discovered by our rulers, from whom it was hid. It was not discovered by the severe indagation and watchfulness of ministers of state from foreign intelligence, the usual way of discovering such plots. It was not discovered by persons of authority and interest, to warrant the discovery. It was not so in a time when the nation was awake, and looked about them, and were jealous of such things; but in the deepest security. It hath admitted, it hath met with all the endeavours of hell and men for the covering of it; yet through the conduct of the holy providence of God, it hath broke forth to that discovery, as that it is publicly proclaimed to all the nation. I say with the wife of Manoah: 'If God would have destroyed us, he would not have shewed us this thing.' If he had utterly forsaken us, he would have left us to have been swallowed up, when we should not have had leisure to have cried, alas! To me, I say, it is an evidence that England is not yet utterly forsaken.

2. That God hath stirred up some, at least, of the nobles, and our rulers, to follow on this discovery, to bring it forth to light, and to pursue them to condign punishment, who were the contrivers, authors, abettors, and carriers on of that bloody design. I will not speak one word or syllable to their dishonour or disrespect, who deserve both honour and respect from us: but this I will say, that if I know them, or any thing of them, this is not from themselves; this is from the clothing of the Spirit of God, and anointing to this very work, and is not from themselves, nor their own principles, nor their own inclinations, but the hand of God in them and upon them. Add hereunto the strange and wonderful quiet disposure of the magistracy of this city into the hand of persons, prudent, diligent, and watchful, whom we have reason to pray for, and bless God for. And it is strengthened by the stirring up of a spirit in the common people, unto an unheard-of heat and earnestness in bearing witness and testimony against popery and all their abominations, in such a manner as hath not fallen out in

any nation under heaven, and this acted above and beyond their spirits and principles. These things to me are some evidences, that England is not yet utterly forsaken of the Lord its God, though the land be full of sin.

3. I could instance in the embroilments of foreign nations abroad. At this time they are all quiet; but who is there that doth not know that they all stand as it were on the tiptoe, looking who shall first begin to cut throats, and kill men? Even all the nations in Europe are in this posture at this day. Though they are quiet this cold weather, yet who shall begin first, who shall make the attack, and who shall defend, is the talk of all Europe, whereby some of them may have been hindered from a public contributing to the ruin of this poor nation.

4. It is an evidence that England is not yet forsaken, in that a secret, efficacious influence of divine providence hath preserved the body politic of the nation in its being and union, when all the ligaments of law and mutual trust have been broken. There hath been such a dissolution of mutual trust, and all ordinary ligaments of the politic union of a nation, that if God had not powerfully grasped the whole in his hand, we had long since been in confusion, and every man's sword had been in the side of his brother and his neighbour. But to this day we are preserved in peace by a secret, influential power of divine wisdom and providence, whose footsteps I would adore more and more; which is so much the more excellent, in that it is not visible, and by outward force, but merely upon the minds of men. This is to me another evidence that England is not yet forsaken of its God, the Lord of hosts.

5. My last is this: that after God hath by so many ways, and so many means, declared unto us his displeasure against our sin, having declared the sentence in his word, yet he hath visibly granted an arrest of judgment. The sentence shall not be put in execution, saith God, while I give this people a time, and space, and season of repentance and reformation. Alas! if God had utterly forsaken us, he would have taken us off in the midst of our security; evil would have risen, and we should have known the morning of it; destruction would presently have overtaken us. But now God hath given us various calls, various warnings, and

leaves us a space as yet, to see what we will do, and what will become of us. I will give them a trial, saith God, the decree shall not yet go forth, judgment shall not yet come forth to execution, I will give them a space for repentance. And this consideration hath a double corroboration of this blessed space and season God hath given us for to apply ourselves so far to his call, as to remove his judgments that are impending over us.

(1.) The first is, that he hath reserved a remnant among us, that do make use of this space and season to apply themselves unto the throne of grace, and to cry mightily for mercy. God hath not taken his Holy Spirit from us. God hath not said by any open work, or secret intimation of providence, 'Pray no more for this people; my heart shall not be toward them.' He hath not said so; and therefore, there are yet among us precious souls, who do lift up prayers to God night and day, not only for themselves and families, not only for the church of God, but for this poor land of our nativity, that, if it were the will of God, we may not see it soaked in blood; that God would not come forth to destroy it with a curse; that God would pity, and spare, and have mercy upon it; that he would not make it an 'aceldama,' 'a field of blood.' There are many cries to God to this purpose. So that there are some, by whom this space and season God hath given us, is made use of.

(2.) It hath strength from this, that there is an invitation and encouragement given to the whole nation, to join together in their cries to God this day for the same end and purpose. I confess to you, give me leave to speak it, I am afraid the body of the nation, considering their conduct in this sort of duty, will make no great work of it, towards the averting of judgments in such a day as this is. And I am afraid also, that the approaching carnival, or time of feasting, will quickly blot out all impressions that ought to be in the minds of men from such a day as this is. This is all I can say, God is publicly acknowledged, and what influence that may have in a farther suspension of judgment, till the nation be better prepared to seek unto him, I know not.

Methinks these are evidences (to me they are) that England is not yet utterly forsaken of the Lord its God: the miraculous discovery of the plot for our destruction: the

pursuit of it by some of our rulers, and the body of the nation: the embroilment of foreign nations in their own concerns: the preservation of the political interest and body, when all the ligaments of law, and love, and trust were dissolved: the space and season that God gives us, that we are not immediately hurried into blood and confusion, attended with a spirit of prayer in some of God's own people: and with a public acknowledgment of God in this day in the nation.

III. I should now proceed to my last thing, to shew you, that in this state, wherein a land is so filled with sin, as absolutely to put the determination of all things into the hand of sovereignty, and where yet there remains some evidences that God hath not utterly forsaken us, what is required of us, what is expected from us, that may be a means to turn away the wrath and displeasure of God from this poor land and nation.

I should have spoken to the following things:

1. That whatsoever be the language of God's calls, unless there be a general compliance with them, this land cannot be saved.

2. I should have shewn you, that all the diligence, and the courage, and the watchfulness of the rulers, shall not be able to preserve us from that destruction which we have deserved; unless something else be done ere long, their hearts will faint, and their hands fail, and their thoughts be divided. For that alone will not do.

3. Prayer will not do in this case, though that be necessary and required, it will not do it. God doth not cry to us merely that we should cry to him. 'Why criest thou,' said God to Joshua, 'there is an accursed thing.' Why dost thou lie upon thy face, and cry, and pray, when judgment is coming upon you? There is an accursed thing got among you. It is so with us.

To speak very plain in a plain case; the state of this nation is such, let our expectation and our hopes be what they will, and prognostics be multiplied, God can multiply upon another hand: the case of this nation is such, that without repentance evidenced, and universal reformation sincerely endeavoured, England cannot be saved, will not be saved; God will forsake it, destruction from the Lord will overtake us.

5. I should have told you also what I judge indispensably necessary that any such reformation may be obtained in this nation. As,

(1.) That there be, through the providence of God, provided another manner of administration of the word throughout the nation, than at present there is, which is the only means of conviction, and conversion unto God. Signs, and wonders, and judgments terrify; it is the word that must reform and turn to God. And if the state of things continue so, that some who are able and wise for the work are forbid, and others, that engross all to themselves, are either unable, or negligent in it; I have no great hopes of seeing reformation in this land.

(2.) Unless the generality of magistrates be better principled for, and better instructed in, their office, than as yet they seem to be, a reformation will not be carried through this nation. And,

(3.) Which is the principal; that those who have been examples in sinning, and in drawing others to sin, become examples in repenting, and reforming, and turning to God.

(4.) Lastly, that the whole nation be stirred up, and do not faint in the pursuit of it.

I have scarce been able to speak the heads of these things unto you. I wish I had strength to speak all that is in my thoughts and heart upon this matter, unto this whole nation; for hereon, and not on any think else, depends the deliverance and safety of it.

SERMON XVIII.

THE

NATURE AND BEAUTY OF GOSPEL WORSHIP.

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.—EPHES. ii. 18.

IN the foregoing verses the apostle makes mention of a double reconciliation, wrought by the blood of the cross; the one of the Jews and Gentiles unto God; the other of the same persons one to another. There were two things in the law. First, Worship instituted under it. Secondly, The curse annexed unto it. The first of these being appropriated to the Jews, with an exclusion of the Gentiles, was the cause of unspeakable enmity and hatred between them. The latter, or the curse falling upon both, was a cause of enmity between God and both of them. The Lord Jesus Christ, in his death removing both these, wrought and effected the twofold reconciliation mentioned. First, 'He brake down the middle wall of partition between us,' ver. 14. and so 'made both one;' that is, 'between us,' the Jews and Gentiles. He hath taken away all cause of difference that should hinder us to be one in him. And how hath he done this? By taking away the 'law of commandments contained in ordinances,' ver. 15. that is, by abolishing that way of worship which was the Jews' privilege and burden, from which the Gentiles were excluded; so breaking down that wall of partition. Secondly, By the cross at his death he slew the enmity, or took away the curse of the law; so reconciling both Jews and Gentiles unto God, as ver. 16. By bearing the curse of the law he reconciled both unto God; by taking away and abolishing the worship of the law he took away all grounds of difference amongst them.

Upon this reconciliation ensueth a twofold advantage or privilege: an access into the favour of God, who before was at enmity with them; and a new and more glorious way of

approaching unto God in his worship, than that about which they were before at difference among themselves.

The first of these is mentioned, Rom. v. 2. And that, which is there called, an 'access into this grace wherein we stand,' may in the text be called, an 'access unto the Father:' that is, the favour and acceptance with God which we do enjoy. Thus our access unto God is our sense of acceptance with him upon the reconciliation made for us by Jesus Christ. But this seems not to me to be the special intendment of the text; for that access unto God here mentioned, seems to be the effect of the reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles among themselves: by the abolishing of the ceremonial worship, a new and more glorious way of worship being now provided for them both in common, is there expressed. Before the reconciliation made, one party alone had the privilege of the carnal worship then instituted; but now both parties have in common such a way of worship, wherein they have immediate access unto God; in which the apostle asserts the beauty and glory of the gospel worship of Jews and Gentiles above that, which enjoyed by the Jews, was a matter of separation and division between them. And this appears to be the intendment of the words from ver. 17. That which is here asserted, is not an immediate effect of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ on the cross, but of his preaching peace unto, and calling both Jews and Gentiles, gathering them unto himself, and so to the worship of God: being called by the word of peace, both the one and the other, as to our worship, we have this access.

And the following words, to the end of the chapter, do make it yet more plain and evident. Sundry things doth the apostle, upon the account of this their access unto God, speak of the Gentiles.

First, Negatively, that they are no more 'strangers and foreigners,' ver. 19. that is, that they are not so in respect of the worship of God, as in that state and condition wherein they were before their calling, through a participation of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ. The apostle had declared, ver. 11, 12. they were the uncircumcision, aliens, foreigners; that is, men who had no share in, nor admittance unto, the solemn worship of God, which was em-

paled in the commonwealth of Israel; but now, says he, ye are so no more; that is, you have a portion and interest in that worship, wherewith God is well pleased.

Secondly, Positively, the apostle affirms two things of them. First, That they are 'fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;' ver. 19. Secondly, That they were built up to be 'an holy temple,' or 'an habitation to God;' ver. 20—22. Both which relate to the solemn worship of God under the gospel. The first asserts them to be now members of the church; the latter, that by and among them God was worshipped with that divine service, which came in the room of that which was appointed in the temple, now by Christ removed and taken away.

This being the design of the Holy Ghost in this place, I shall present it in this one proposition unto you:

That it is an eminent effect and fruit of our reconciliation unto God, and among ourselves by the blood of Christ; that believers enjoy the privileges of the excellent, glorious, spiritual worship of God in Christ, revealed and required in the gospel.

I shall in the prosecution of this subject,

I. Briefly prove, That we obtain this privilege as a fruit, and upon the account of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ.

II. Shew, That the worship of the gospel is indeed so beautiful, glorious, and excellent, that the enjoyment of it is an eminent privilege: which I shall principally manifest from the text, and in so doing open the several parts of it.

I. That believers enjoy this privilege as a fruit and effect of the death and blood of Jesus Christ, I shall confirm only with one or two places of Scripture; Heb. ix. 8. compared with chap. x. 19—22. Whilst the first tabernacle was standing, before Christ by his death had removed it, and the worship that accompanied it, which was the partition wall mentioned that he brake down, there was no immediate admission unto God; the way into the holiest, not made with hands, which we now make use of in the gospel worship, was not yet laid open; but the worshippers were kept at a great distance, making their application unto God by outward, carnal ordinances. The tabernacle being removed, now a way is made, and an entrance is given to the worship-

pers, into the holiest in their worship. How is that obtained? by what means? chap. x. 19—21. it is 'by the blood of Jesus Christ,' by the rending of his flesh. This privilege of entering into the holiest, which is a true expressing of all gospel worship, could no otherwise be obtained for, nor granted unto believers, but by the blood of Christ. 'We enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,' by which he prepared, perfected, or 'consecrated for us a new and living way' into it. Peter also gives us the same account of the rise of this privilege, 1 Epist. ii. 4, 5. That which is ascribed unto believers is, that they offer up 'spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ.' That is the worship whereof we speak. To fit them for, and enable them hereunto, they are 'made a spiritual house, a holy priesthood;' they are both the temple wherein God dwells by his Spirit, and they are the priests that offer acceptable sacrifices unto him. By what means then do they attain this honour? by their 'coming unto Christ,' and that as he was 'disallowed of men and chosen of God.' Herein the apostle includes the whole mystery of his death and blood-shedding, wherein he was most openly rejected of men, and most eminently owned of God in his accomplishment of the work of reconciliation.

I shall not farther confirm the first part of the proposition, but proceed to evidence,

II. That the worship of God under the gospel is so excellent, beautiful, and glorious, that it may well be esteemed a privilege purchased by the blood of Christ, which no man can truly and really be made partaker of, but by virtue of an interest in the reconciliation by him wrought. For 'by him we have an access in one Spirit unto God.'

This, as I said, I shall evince two ways.

First, Absolutely.

Secondly, Comparatively, in reference unto any other way of worship whatever.

And the first I shall do from the text.

It is a principle deeply fixed in the minds of men, yea, ingrafted into them by nature, that the worship of God ought to be orderly, comely, beautiful, and glorious. Hence men in all ages, who have thought it incumbent on them to imagine, find out, and frame the worship of God, or any thing

thereunto belonging, have made it constantly their design to fix on things, either in themselves, or in the manner of their performance, to their judgment, beautiful, orderly, comely, and glorious. And indeed that worship may be well suspected not to be according to the mind of God, which comes short in these properties of order and beauty, comeliness and glory. I shall add unto this, only this reasonable assertion, which no man can well deny, viz. That what is so in his worship and service, God himself is the most proper judge. If then we evince not that spiritual gospel worship, in its own naked simplicity, without any other external, adventitious helper or countenance, is most orderly, comely, beautiful and glorious, the Holy Ghost in the Scripture being judge, we shall be content to seek for these things where else, as it is pretended, they may be found. To this end,

1. The first thing in general observable from these words is, that in the spiritual worship of the gospel, the whole blessed Trinity, and each Person therein distinctly, do in that economy and dispensation, wherein they act severally and peculiarly in the work of our redemption, afford distinct communion with themselves unto the souls of the worshippers. So are they all here distinctly mentioned: 'Through him,' that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, 'we have access by one Spirit,' that good and Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, unto God, that is, the Father; for so is that name to be taken ὑποστατικῶς, 'personally,' when it is mentioned in distinction from the Son and Spirit. There is no act, part, or duty of gospel worship, wherein the worshippers have not this distinct communion with each Person in the blessed Trinity. The particulars shall be afterward spoken unto.

This is the general order of gospel worship, the great rubric of our service. Here in general lieth its decency, that it respects the mediation of the Son, through whom we have access, and the supplies and assistance of the Spirit, and a regard unto God, as a Father. He that fails in any one of these, he breaks all order in gospel worship. If either we come not unto it by Jesus Christ, or perform it not in the strength of the Holy Ghost, or in it go not unto God as a Father, we transgress all the rules of this worship. This is the great canon, which if it be neglected, there is no de-

cency in whatever else is done in this way. And this in general is the glory of it. Worship is certainly an act of the soul; Matt. xxii. 37. The body hath its share by concomitancy and subserviency to the direction of the mind. The acts of the mind and soul receive their advancements and glory from the object about which they are conversant. Now that in this gospel worship, is God himself in his Son and Holy Ghost, and none else. Acting faith on Christ for admission, and on the Holy Ghost for his assistance, so going on in his strength; and on God, even the Father, for acceptance, is the work of the soul in this worship. That it hath any thing more glorious to be conversant about, I am as yet to learn. But these things will be handled apart afterward. This in general is the order and glory of that worship of which we speak.

2. The same is evident from the general nature of it, that it is an access unto God. 'Through him we have an access to God.' There are two things herein that set forth the excellency, order, and glory of it: (1.) It brings an access; (2.) The manner of that access, intimated in the word here used, it is προσαγωγή.

(1.) It is an access, an approach, a drawing nigh unto God: so the apostle calls it, a 'drawing near;' Heb. x. 22. 'Let us draw nigh with a true heart,' that is, unto God, in the holiest; ver. 19. In the first giving out of the law, and instituting the legal worship, the people were commanded to keep at a distance, and they were not, on pain of death, so much as to touch the mount where the presence of God was; Exod. xix. 12. And accordingly they stood afar off, whilst Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was; chap. xx. 21. So not only when the high-priest went into the most holy place once a year with blood (of which afterward), but when the priests in their courses went into the holy place to burn incense daily, the people were kept without, as Luke i. 10. But this gospel worship is our access or drawing nigh to God; no interposition of veils, or any other carnal ordinance whatever. All is made open, and a new and living way of access given unto us; Heb. x. 20. And what in general can be added to set forth the glory of this worship, to a soul that knows what it is to draw nigh to God, I know not. The heathens of old derided the

Egyptians, who through many stately edifices, and with most pompous ceremonies, brought their worshippers to the image of an ape. I say no more; but let them look to it, how they will acquit themselves, who frame much of their worship in a ceremonious access to an altar, or an image. The plea of referring unto God at the last, hath been common to all idolaters of what sort soever, from the foundation of the world.

(2.) It is a προσαγωγὴ that we have in this worship, a manuduction unto God, in order, and with much glory. It is such an access as men have to the presence of a king, when they are handed in by some favourite or great person. This, in this worship, is done by Christ. He takes the worshippers by the hand, and leads them into the presence of God; there presenting them (as we shall see), saying, 'Behold, I and the children which God hath given me;' Heb. ii. 13. This is the access of believers; thus do they enter into the presence of God. Some, it may be, will be ready to say, that a man may be ashamed to speak such great things as these of poor worms, who have neither order in their way, nor eloquence in their words, nor comeliness in their worship. Let such men know that they must yet hear greater things of them; and it is meet indeed they should be in all things conformable unto Christ; and therefore have neither form, nor comeliness, nor beauty in themselves, their way, or their worship to the eyes of the world, as Isa. liii. 2. And 'the world knows not' them and their ways, because 'it knew not him' nor his ways; 1 John iii. 1. But if God may be allowed to judge in his own matters, the spiritual worship of the saints is glorious, since in it they have such an access, such a manuduction unto God.

3. From the immediate object of this worship, and that is God. We have an access to God. It is, as I said, the Father who is here peculiarly intended; God as God: He who is the beginning and end of all, whose nature is attended with infinite perfection: He, from whom a sovereignty over all doth proceed, is the formal object of all divine and religious worship. Hence divine worship respects, as its object, each Person of the blessed Trinity equally, not as this or that Person, but as this or that Person is God; that is the formal reason of all divine worship. But yet as the second

Person is considered as vested with his office of mediation, and the Holy Ghost as the comforter and sanctifier of his saints; so God the Father is in a peculiar manner the object of our faith, and love, and worship. So Peter tells us, 1 Epist. i. 21. That 'through Christ we believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory.' Christ being considered as mediator, God that raised him from the dead, that is the Father, is regarded as the ultimate object of our worship; though worshipping him who is the Father as God, the other Persons are in the same nature worshipped. This whole matter is declared, Gal. iv. 6. (which I cannot now particularly open) with this explanation, that in our access unto God, Christ being considered as the mediator, and the Holy Ghost as our comforter, advocate, and assister, the saints have a peculiar respect unto the Person of the Father.

There are two things that hence arise, evidencing the order, decency, and glory of gospel worship: (1.) That we have in it a direct and immediate access unto God; (2.) That we have access unto God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and ours in him.

(1.) This is no small part of the glory of this worship, that our access is unto God himself. When outward worship was in its height and glory, the access of the worshippers immediately was but unto some visible sign and pledge of God's presence. Such was the temple itself; such was the ark, and the mercy-seat. So Paul describing the tabernacle and temple worshippers, Heb. x. 1. calls them προσερχομένους, 'the comers unto sacrifices.' There was, as it were, a stop put upon their access in the visible representations of God's majesty and presence to which they did approach. But now, in this spiritual worship of the gospel, the saints have direct and immediate access unto God, 'the way into the holiest' not made with hands being laid open unto them all. And where they are enjoined the use of any outward signs, as in the sacraments, it is not, as it were to stop them there from entering into heaven, but to help them forward in their entrance, as all know who are acquainted with their true nature and use. I do not say, that any of the worship of old was limited in the sensible pledge and tokens of God's presence; but only that the spirit of the worshippers was kept in sub-

jection, so as to approach unto God only as he exhibited himself to their faith in those signs, and not immediately as we do under the gospel.

(2.) We have in this spiritual worship of the gospel access unto God, as a father. I shewed in the opening of the words, that God is distinctly proposed here as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our God and Father. Hence are we said to come 'to the throne of grace,' Heb. iv. 16. that is, unto God, as he is gloriously exalted in the dispensation of grace, in kindness, love, mercy, in a word, as a father. God on the throne of grace, and God as a father is all one consideration; for as a father, he is all love, grace, and mercy to his children in Christ. When God came of old to institute his worship in giving of the law, he did it with the dreadful and terrible representation of his majesty, that the people chose not to come near, but went and 'stood afar off, and said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us lest we die;' Exod. xx. 18, 19. And by this dreadful representation of the majesty of God, as the object of that worship, were they kept in fear and bondage all their days. But now are the saints encouraged to make their approach unto God as a father, the glory whereof the apostle excellently expresseth, Rom. viii. 14, 15. That fear and bondage, wherein men were kept under the law, is now removed, and in the place thereof a spirit of children, with reverent boldness going to their father, is given unto us. This, I say, adds to the glory, beauty, and excellency of gospel worship. There is not the meanest believer, but with his most broken prayers and supplications, hath an immediate access unto God, and that as a father; nor the most despised church of saints on the earth, but it comes with its worship into the glorious presence of God himself. And this I shall add by the way; that men's attempting to worship God, who are not interested in this privilege of access unto him, is the ground of all the superstitious idolatry that is in the world. I shall instance in two things, which are the springs of all others.

[1.] Having not experience of the excellency of this privilege, nor being satisfied with the use of it, men have turned aside to the worship of saints and angels in heaven. This is the very substance of all the reasons that the Papists plead

in the justification of that superstition. To have access to God! It is too great a boldness to come to him immediately; and so it becomes us humbly to make use of the favourites of the court of heaven, of saints and angels, to desire them to entreat with God for us. Now not to speak of their unacquaintedness with the mediation of Christ herein, which is plain infidelity; what is this but directly saying, we understand nothing of gospel worship (wherein believers by Christ have a direct 'access with boldness' to God himself), and therefore it is that we had rather fix on this 'voluntary humility,' as the apostle calls it, Col. ii. 18. than venture on this access unto God? This, I say, is the reasoning of men unacquainted with this part of the glory of gospel worship.

[2.] Hence are they forced to invent outward, visible pledges and signs of God's presence, as they imagine, to which they may have access; seeing they are unacquainted with that which is directly unto God himself. Hence images and pictures, altars and the east must be regarded in worship, with which they can have an immediate conversation, have an access in their thoughts to them, and, as they think, by them unto God. And on the same account must the sacraments be changed, and that which was appointed to assist us in our entrance unto God, be made a god, that men may have an easy access unto him. Carnal men, that know nothing of the other, whose souls are not at all moulded or affected by any pure act of faith, are here stirred by their senses, and act by them in their worship. And this is the ground wherein all their pompous rites, invented by men in the worship of God, do grow; even a design and engine to afford carnally minded men somewhat to be conversant about in their worship, who have no principle to enable them to use this privilege of approaching unto God himself. It is true, they will say, it is God alone whom they worship, and whom they intend to draw nigh unto: but I must needs say, that if they knew what it were to do so immediately by Christ, they would be satisfied therewith, and not seek such outward helps in their way, as they do.

4. It appears from the principal procuring cause and means of this our access to God, which is Jesus Christ; through him we have this access; this is a new spring of beauty and glory, which we must consider in the particulars

of it. That access which the people of God had to the outward pledge of his presence, was by their high priest, and that not in his own person, but barely in his representation of them, and that but 'once a year;' but in the worship of the gospel, the saints have an access through Christ unto God himself in their own persons, and that continually. Now we have this access through Christ upon many accounts.

(1.) Because he hath purchased and procured this favour for us, that we should so approach unto God, and find acceptance with him. 'We are accepted in the Beloved;' Eph. i. 6. I must not stay to shew, how by paying a ransom for us, and 'bearing our iniquities,' he hath answered the law, removed the curse, reconciled us to God, pacified his anger, satisfied justice, procured for us eternal redemption; all which belongs to his procuring for us this favour of acceptance with God. The apostle gives us the sum of it, Heb. ii. 17. He hath as a high priest 'made reconciliation for the sins of the people,' on the account whereof they have an 'access by faith unto this grace;' Rom. v. 1, 2. In this sense have we our access unto God through Christ. He hath purchased it for us. It is no small portion of the price of his blood. Nothing else could procure it; not all the wealth of the world, not all the worth of angels in heaven; none could do it but himself. Go into the most pompous, stately place of outward worship upon the earth, consider all the wealth and glory of its structure and ornaments; it is an easy thing for a wise man to guess what it all cost, and what is the charge of it; however, none so foolish but can tell you it is all the price of money; it was 'bought with silver and gold, and corruptible things;' it is the thick clay; and he that hath most money, may render that kind of worship most beauteous and glorious. But now the gospel worship of believers is the price of the 'blood of the Son of God.' Access to God for sinners could no other way be obtained. Let men, as the prophet speaks, 'lavish gold out of their bags,' Isa. xlvi. 6. upon their idols; their self-invented worship shall come as short in true glory and beauty of the meanest prayers of poor saints, as the purchase of corruptible things doth of the fruit of the blood and death of the Son of God; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

(2.) We have this access from Christ, inasmuch as he hath opened, prepared, and dedicated a way for us to enter into the presence of God. Favour being procured, a way of entrance is also to be provided; otherwise poor souls might say, There is water indeed in the well, but 'the well is deep, and we have not wherewith to draw.' There is an acceptance purchased for us in the presence of God; but by what way shall we come unto him? I say, he hath provided for us also a way whereby we may enter, Heb. x. 19, 20. 'By a new and living way.' The way into the holiest of old was through the veil that hung always before, which the apostle calls the 'second veil,' chap. ix. 3. The form and use thereof you have, Exod. xxvi. 31, 32, &c. Through this veil the high-priest entered into the holy place. Instead hereof, for an entrance into the presence of God in the holy place not made with hands, Christ hath provided and dedicated a 'new and living way' for us. This way is himself, as he telleth Thomas, John xiv. 6. 'I am the way:' it is by him alone that any can obtain an access unto God. But as to our constant approach in worship, there is a peculiar respect had unto his suffering for us in the flesh. We enter by his blood, and 'through his flesh.' How is that? As men being to go to some great potentate or general in an army, have, it may be, some word or token which they shew, declare, or make use of, if by any they are hindered in their address: so is it with believers; the law would stop them in their access to God, so would sin and Satan; but their being 'sprinkled with the blood of Christ,' is the token that lays all open unto them, and removes all obstacles out of the way: and when they come into the presence of God, it is the suffering of Christ in the flesh that they insist on as to their acceptation with him. They go to God through him, in his name, 'making mention of his righteousness,' death, and blood-shedding, pleading for acceptance on his account. This is their 'new and living way' of going unto God, this path they tread, this entrance they use; and no man can obtain an access unto God, but by an interest herein. I wonder not at all, that men who know not this way, who have no share, nor ever took one step in it, do fix on any kind of worship whatever, rather than once make trial what it is to place the glory of their worship in an access unto

God; seeing they have no interest in this way, without which all attempts after it would be altogether fruitless and vain. Now this adds to the order, and increaseth the glory and beauty of the spiritual worship of the gospel. Go to the mass-book and the rubric of it; you will see how many instructions and directions they give priests, about the way of going into their sanctum, and to their altars; how they must bow and bend themselves, sometimes one way, sometimes another, sometimes kneel, sometimes stand, sometimes go backward, sometimes forward; this is their way to the breaden-god: this they call order, and beauty, and glory, and with such-like things are poor simple sots deluded, and carnal wretches, enemies to Christ and his Spirit, blinded to their eternal ruin. Surely methinks this way of gospel access to God, is far more comely and glorious: it is in and by Christ, a way dedicated by himself on purpose; it is sprinkled with his blood; it is opened by his suffering in the flesh; and abides 'new and living' for ever. Were not blindness come on men to the utmost, were it not evident that they can see nothing afar off, that they are wholly carnal and unspiritual, 'savouring not the things of God,' it were impossible that they should reject these pearls of the gospel for the husks of swine, such things as they shall never be able to vie with the old heathen in. This only may be said in their excuse, That they cast away and reject what they had no share in, for that which is most properly their own.

(3.) We have this access through Christ, in that he is entered before us into the presence of God to make way for our access unto him, and our acceptance with him. So the apostle, Heb. iv. 14. 'We have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.' He is gone already into the presence of God to that purpose. The same apostle tells us, chap. vi. 19, 20. Let us look to 'that within the veil, whither Jesus the forerunner is for us entered:' *πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν.* The words are better rendered, 'The forerunner for us is entered.' He is a forerunner for us; one that is gone into the presence of God to declare that all his saints are coming to him, coming into his presence with their solemn worship and oblations: he is entered into heaven himself, to carry as it were tidings, and make way for the entrance of his saints. This is no small encou-

ragement to follow him: he is gone before for us, and is in continual expectation of the coming of them whose forerunner he is; as it is the manner of those who take that office. And this also adds to the glory of gospel worship, with them to whom Christ is precious and honourable: with them by whom he is despised, it is no wonder if his ways be so also. This belongs also to the rubric, and adds to the order of gospel worship. It is an access to God, even the Father, in the holy place not made with hands, on the account of the atonement made, and favour and acceptance purchased by Jesus Christ, being sprinkled with his blood, and following him, as one that is gone before to provide admittance for us. Here is order and beauty too, if we have either faith or eyes to apprehend or perceive what is so.

(4.) We have this access through Christ, as he is 'the high priest over the house of God.' This the apostle at large declares, and much insists upon, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. One or two places shall suffice to instance in. Chap. iv. 14 to the 16. the inference which the apostle makes from this consideration, that Christ is our 'high priest entered into heaven,' is, that we should 'draw nigh unto the throne of grace:' and because he is such a holy priest as he there describes, that we should draw nigh with boldness, or spiritual confidence of our acceptance with God. And this the apostle manageth at large throughout that Epistle; that notwithstanding all the outward glory and splendour of the legal worship, yet that which is appointed in the gospel is far to be preferred before it, inasmuch as the High Priest of this is unspeakably above the high priest by whom that was principally administered. And again, chap. x. 21, 22. the encouragement to draw nigh to God is taken from this, that we have a 'high priest over the house of God.' And it is also considerable, what the Holy Ghost requireth in them, who should come nigh to worship God under the guidance and conduct of this blessed and merciful High Priest: is it, that they have such vestments and ornaments in their admission? No; but faith, and sanctification, and holiness, are the three great qualifications of these worshippers. 'Let us draw nigh,' saith he, 'in full assurance of faith,' &c. 'and our bodies washed with pure water;' that is, purified with the blood of Christ, typified in the water of baptism;

or else, it may be, effectually cleansed in soul and body by the Holy Ghost, who is frequently compared to water in the work of purifying and sanctifying the souls of believers.

Upon this general head I might make a long stand, to evidence the beauty, order, and glory of the spiritual worship of God, in that it is our access to God through Christ, 'as the great high priest over the house of God.' This indeed is so great, that the apostle makes it the sum of his whole dispute about the excellency of the gospel, and our coming to God thereby; Heb. viii. 12. This is, saith he, upon the matter, the sum of all. Those with whom we have to do, they had a high priest, in whom, and the administration by him performed, consisted the glory of all their worship. 'We also,' saith he, 'have a high priest no less than they had;' but herein there is no comparison between them and us, that we have such a high priest, whom he describes: first, from his own dignity, honour, and glory; he is 'set on the right hand of the Majesty of heaven:' secondly, from his office or ministry; namely, that he ministers not in a tabernacle, such as was that of Moses and Solomon's temple, but in heaven itself, the place of the glorious presence and immediate manifestation of God's glory, which he calls, 'the tabernacle which the Lord pitched;' that is, which he appointed for the place of worship to his saints under the ministry of Christ, their high priest. And though other places are necessary here on earth for their assemblies, as they are men clothed with flesh and infirmities, yet there is none pitched, appointed, or consecrated, for the holy and solemn acceptance of their service, but heaven itself, where the High Priest is always ready to administer it before God. And as to the assemblies here below, all places are now alike. And what can be more glorious than this; namely, that the whole spiritual worship of the gospel, performed here on earth by the saints, is administered in heaven by such a holy priest, who is at the right hand of the throne of the majesty of God, and yet under his conduct we have by faith an entrance into the presence of God?

Go to now, you by whom the spiritual worship of the gospel is despised, that unless it be adorned, as you say, or rather defiled with the rites and ceremonies of your own invention, think there is no order, comeliness, or beauty in it.

Set yourselves to find out whatever pleaseth your imaginations; borrow this of the Jews, that of the Pagans, all of the Papists that you think conducing to that end and purpose; lavish gold out of the bag for the beautifying of it: will it compare with this glory of the worship of the gospel, that is all carried on under the conduct and administration of this glorious High Priest? It may be they will say, That they have that too, and that ornaments do not hinder but that they have also their worship attended with that glory relating to the holy priest. But do they think so indeed, and do they no more value it than it seems they do? Why are they not contented with it, but they must find out many inventions of their own to help to set it off? Surely it is impossible that men, thoroughly convinced of its spiritual excellency, should fall into that fond conceit of making additions of their own unto it. Nor do they seem rightly to weigh, that the holy God doth all along oppose this spiritual excellency of gospel worship to the outward splendour of rites and ordinances, instituted by himself for a time; so that what men seek to make up in these things doth but absolutely derogate from the other; and all will one day know, whether it be for want of excellency in the spiritual administration of the gospel worship, under and by the glorious High Priest, or for want of minds enlightened to discern it, and hearts quickened to experience it, that some do lay all the weight of the beauty of gospel worship on matters that they either find out themselves, or borrow from others, who were confessedly blind as to all spiritual communion with God in Christ. But 'if any man list to contend, we have no such custom, neither the church of God:' only I hope it will not be accounted a crime, that any please themselves, and are contented with that glory and beauty in their worshipping of God, which is given unto it from hence, that they have in it an access to God by Jesus Christ, as the great high priest of their profession and service. However, I am sure this is, and may well be, an unspeakable encouragement and comfort in the duty of drawing nigh unto God, to all the saints, whether in their persons, families, or assemblies, that Jesus Christ is the great high priest that admits them to the presence of God, who is the minister of that heavenly tabernacle where God is worshipped by them. If

we are but able, as the apostle speaks, to 'look to the things that are not seen,' 2 Cor. iv. 18. that is, with eyes of faith, we shall find that glory that will give us rest and satisfaction: and for others, we may pray as Elisha for his servant, that 'the Lord would open their eyes,' and they would quickly see the naked poor places of the saints' assemblies, not only attended with 'horses and chariots of fire,' but also Christ 'walking in the midst of them,' in the glory wherewith he is described, Rev. i. 13—15. which surely their painted or carved images will be found to come short of. And if the Lord Jesus Christ be pleased, in his unspeakable love, to call his churches and ministers 'his glory,' as he doth, 2 Cor. viii. 23. surely these may be contented to make him their only glory. To which purpose we may observe,

[1.] Our Saviour Christ warns us of some, who 'thought to be heard' for their heathenish 'vain repetition and much babblings;' Matt. vi. 7. I will not make application of it unto any: but this I say, that men will not be a little mistaken, if they think to be heard for any carnal, self-invented futherance of their devotion. But here lies the joy and confidence of the poor saints; they have a merciful high priest over the house of God, by whom they are encouraged to draw nigh with boldness to the throne of grace; he takes them by the hand, and leads them into the presence of God, where, through his means, they obtain a favourable acceptance.

[2.] Nor need they be solicitous about their outward estate and condition. This was the misery of the Jews of old, that when they were driven from Jerusalem, and carried into captivity, they were deprived of all the solemn worship of God; they had no high priest, no sacrifice, no altar, tabernacle, or solemn assemblies, which were all tied to that place. Hence we find how bitterly David complains, when, by the persecution of Saul, he was for a season driven from the place of God's holy and solemn worship: he saw not the glorious ornaments of the high priest, nor the beautiful structure of the tabernacle, nor the order of the Levites and priests in worship. It is now otherwise with the people of God; be they never so poor, and destitute of all outward accommodations; are their assemblies in the 'mountains, in the caves and dens of the earth,' Christ, according to his promise, is 'in the midst of them' as their high priest, and they have in

their worship all the order, glory, and beauty (I mean observing gospel rules) that in any place under heaven they can enjoy, and be made partakers of: all depends on the presence of Christ, and their access to God by him; and he is excluded from no place, but thinks any place adorned sufficiently for him, which his saints are met in, or driven unto. 'Let the hands that hang down be lifted up, and feeble knees be strengthened:' whatever their outward, distressed condition may be, here is order, beauty, and glory in the worship of God, above all that the world can pretend unto.

[3.] Here lies encouragement to them upon a spiritual account, as to the state of things between God and their own souls: they have discoveries made unto them of the glory, majesty, and holiness of God; they know that he is 'a consuming fire;' they have visions of his excellencies, which the world is not acquainted with; they are also sensible of their own poverty, wretchedness, sin, weakness, how unfit, how unable to approach unto him, or to have to do with him in his holy worship: they are ashamed of their own prayers and supplications, and could oftentimes, when they are gone through, wish them undone again, considering how unanswerable they are to the greatness and holiness of God. In this condition there is a plentiful relief tendered to faith from the consideration of this High Priest. That this may be more evident, and that the beauty and glory of gospel worship may be by them farther discovered, I shall particularly insist on some parts of it.

(1st.) Our High Priest bears and takes away all the sinfulness and failings that are in, or do accompany the holy worship of his saints. The world is apt to despise the worship of the saints as mean and contemptible, unmeet for the majesty of God: this puts them on the inventing of what they suppose more glorious and beautiful, though God abhors it: but the saints themselves know that of their defects, wants, and failings in their worship, that the world know not of, and how unfit it is and unsuited to the holy majesty of God with whom they have to do: they know how the bitter root of unbelief in their hearts springs up and defiles them and their duties; how effectually vanity works in their minds, and a secret loathness in their wills, in their best duties, and most solemn acts of worship; besides innumera-

ble other sinful distempers, that oftentimes get ground and place in their hearts. These they know are the things that in and of themselves are enough to defile, pollute, and render abominable all their worship; yea, and if God should 'mark what is amiss,' the guilt of their holy worship is enough to make both it, and them that perform it, to be for ever rejected. But now here is their relief; here beauty, glory, and order is recovered to their worship; Christ, as their high priest, takes away all the evil, filth, and iniquity of their holy things, that they may be presented pure, and holy, and glorious before God. So did Aaron typically of old; Exod. xxviii. 38. Thus doth Christ, our high priest, really answer for all that is amiss, all failings, all miscarriages in his saints, them he takes on his own score; and what is from his Spirit, that enters into the presence of the holy God. So Eph. v. 25—27. he presents it to himself, and by him it is presented unto God. By this means doth the Lord Christ preserve the glory and beauty of gospel worship, notwithstanding all the defects, and failings, and defilements that from the weakness and sins of his saints, do seem to cleave unto it.

(2dly.) This is not enough: besides the weakness, sinfulness, and imperfections that attend the duties, for which they may be justly rejected, there is not any thing of worth in them for which they may be accepted; nothing that should yield a sweet savour unto God; wherefore Christ, as the high priest by whom all believers have their access unto God, takes their duties and prayers, and adds incense unto them, that they may have a sweet savour in heaven; Rev. viii. 3. The altar is the place of the priests offering their sacrifices of prayers; and our altar is in heaven: other men may appoint theirs elsewhere. The Lord Christ, the high priest in the temple of God in heaven, and in the holy place not made with hands, is 'the Angel that stands at the altar before the Lord;' the golden altar of incense before the throne; not the altar for sacrifice, which he hath finished already; but only the altar of incense or intercession, remains. On this golden altar are the prayers of all saints offered: but how came they to be acceptable unto the Lord? Why, this High Priest hath much incense, a bottomless store and treasure of righteousness that he adds unto them, which is the only sweet perfume in the presence of the Lord. This

makes all their worship glorious indeed. Christ, the high priest, takes away the iniquity and failings of them, he adds his own righteousness unto it, and so in his own person offers it on the golden altar, that is, his own self, before the throne of God continually.

Now as this tends exceedingly to the consolation of believers, so it stains the glory of all the outward pompous worship that some are so delighted in. For believers, what can more tend to their comfort and encouragement, than that the Lord Christ takes their poor weak prayers, which themselves are oftentimes ashamed of, and humbled for, and are ready to cry out against themselves by reason of them, and what by taking away the evil of them, what by adding the incense of his own righteousness, makes them acceptable at the throne of grace? They little know what beauty and glory those very duties which they perform, and are troubled at, are clothed withal: and for the beauty and glory of gospel worship, in comparison of all the self-invented rites of men, how will one thought of faith about this administration of Christ in heaven with the prayers of the saints, cast contempt and shame upon them? What is all their gaudy preparation, in comparison of the High Priest of the saints offering up their prayers on the golden altar before the throne of God? This is order, comeliness, and beauty.

Thirdly, Christ, as the high priest of the saints, presents both their persons and their duties in the presence of and before the Lord. This is that which was signified of old in the high priest's precious stones set in gold on his breast and shoulders, with the names of the children of Israel in them; Exod. xxviii. 21. Christ, our high priest, is entered into the holy place for us, and there presents all his saints, and their worship before the Lord, being 'not ashamed to call them brethren,' and saying of them, 'Behold I and the children which the Lord hath given me.'

And this is the fourth thing in the words, manifesting the excellency and glory of gospel worship, taken from the principal procuring cause. It is an access to God, through Christ.

SERMON XIX.

5. This also adds greatly to the glory and excellency of evangelical worship, that we have it in an access unto God, 'in one Spirit,' or 'by one Spirit.'

I shall shew in brief, (1.) How we have it 'by the Spirit; (2.) How 'in one,' or 'by one Spirit.'

(1.) That by the Spirit the Holy Ghost is here intended, is not questioned by any. He is that 'one Spirit' who works in these things, and 'divideth to every one as he pleaseth;' 1 Cor. xi. 13. I shall not here handle the whole work of the Holy Ghost in and upon the souls of the saints, in and for the performance of all the duties of worship wherein they draw nigh unto God, by Christ, and obtain communion with him, as absolutely considered; but only so far as his work renders the worship we speak of beautiful and comely, which is the matter we have in hand. And that I shall do in some few considerations.

[1.] The Lord Jesus Christ hath promised to send his Spirit to believers, to enable them both for matter and manner in the performance of every duty required in the word; Isa. lix. 21. He will give his word and Spirit: the promise of the one and the other is of equal extent and latitude. Whatever God proposeth in his word to be believed, or requireth to be done, that he gives his Spirit to enable to believe and do accordingly: there is neither promise nor precept, but the Spirit is given to enable believers to answer the mind of God in them: nor is the Spirit given to enable unto any duty, but what is in the word required. The Spirit and the word in their several places have an equal latitude; the one as a moral rule, the other as a real principle of efficiency: hence they who require duties which the word enjoins not, have need of other assistances than what the Spirit of grace will afford them: and those who pretend to be led by the Spirit beyond the bounds of the word, had need provide themselves of another gospel. Now with promises hereof doth the gospel abound. He shall 'lead us into all truth;' he shall 'teach us all things;' he shall 'abide with us for ever:' having given his disciples precepts for their whole duty to God and himself, he promiseth them his Spirit

to abide with them, to enable them for the accomplishment of them.

[2.] There are three things that are needful for the right performance of gospel worship. 1st. Light and knowledge, that we may be acquainted with the mind and will of God in it; what it is that he accepteth and approveth, and is appointed by him; that we may know how to 'choose the good and refuse the evil,' like the sheep of Christ 'hearing his voice and following him, not hearkening to the voice of a stranger.' 2dly. Grace in the heart, so that there may be in this access unto God, a true, real, spiritual, saving communion, obtained with him in those acts of faith, love, delight, and obedience which he requireth, without which it is any thing 'impossible to please God.' 3dly. Ability for the performance of the duties that God requireth in his worship, in such a manner as he may be glorified, and those who are called to his worship edified in their most holy faith. Where these three concur, there the worship of God is performed in a due manner, according to his own mind and will, and so, consequently, is excellent, beautiful, and glorious, God himself being judge. Now all these do believers receive by and from the Spirit of Christ, and, consequently, have by him their access to the Father, that is, are enabled unto, and carried on in, the worship which God requireth at their hands.

1st. It is he who enables them to discover the mind of God, and his will concerning his worship, that they may embrace what he hath appointed, and refuse the thing, whereof he will say at the last day, 'Who hath required this at your hands?' He is promised to 'lead them into all truth,' as the Spirit of truth, John xvi. 13. and is the blessed unction that teacheth them all things, 1 John ii. 29. all things for the glory of God, and their own consolation. It is he that speaks the word, which sounds in the ears, 'This is the way, walk in it.' And when Paul prays for the guidance of the saints, he doth it by praying, that God would give them the 'Spirit of wisdom and revelation' in Christ; Eph. i. 17. Now this he doth two ways.

(1st.) By causing them diligently to attend unto the word, the voice of Christ, for their direction, and to that only. This is the great work of the Spirit. So John xvi. 13.

it is said, 'He shall not speak of himself, but what he shall hear, that he shall speak;' that is, he shall reveal and declare nothing but what is the mind of Christ manifested in the word; and that he shall call men to attend unto. 'To the law and to the testimonies,' to the word, that is his constant voice: if men turn to any other teaching, they go out of the compass of his commission; that direction which the Father began from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, hear him.' He is the only master and teacher that the Spirit carries all believers unto; he still cries, hear him, attend unto him speaking in the word. It is true in point of practice according to the rule, for the remedying of scandals and disorders, we are commanded to 'hear the church,' or obey the wholesome directions of it, and to walk according to the gospel: but as to the worship of God, both as to the matter and rules in the appointment of it, we are called continually by the Spirit, to hear Christ always; and that Spirit is not of Christ which sends us to any else.

(2dly.) By revealing the mind of Christ unto us in the word: this is his work which he undertakes and performs. I confess, that notwithstanding the assistance that he is ready to give unto them, there are many mistakes, even amongst the saints themselves, in their apprehensions in and about the worship of God: they are many times careless in attending to his directions; negligent in praying for his assistance; slight and overly in the use of the means by him appointed for the discovery of truths; regardless of dispossessing their minds of prejudices and temptations, hindering them in the discovery of the mind of God: it is, therefore, no wonder they are left to be corrected under their own mistakes and miscarriages. But this hinders not, but that the Spirit may be said to give the knowledge of the worship of God in the word unto believers; and that because it is not, nor can be profitably and savingly attained any other way. As 'no man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Spirit;' so no man can know the way of God's house and worship, but by the Spirit: and we see by experience that those that despise his assistance, rather trust to themselves and other men for the worship of God, than to the word. This he does ordinarily in the use of means, at least so far, that though in some particulars there may be amongst them

mistakes, yet not usually such, but that their performances are accepted of God in Christ. And in those things wherein they are at any time 'otherwise minded' than according to truth, if they continue waiting, 'that also shall be revealed' unto them from the word by the Spirit. The worship of God is not of man's finding out, but of his designation, who is 'the wisdom of God.' It is not taught by human wisdom, nor is it attainable by human industry, but by the wisdom and revelation of the Spirit of God: it is every way divine and heavenly in its rise, in its discovery, and so becoming the greatness and holiness of God. For what doth please God, God himself is the sole judge. If any thing else set up itself in competition with it, for beauty and glory, it will be found to be engaged in a very unequal contest at the last day.

2dly. Believers have this access by the Spirit, inasmuch as he enables them to approach unto God in a spiritual manner, 'with grace in their hearts,' as he is the Spirit of of grace and supplication. This is one special end for which the Spirit is promised unto believers, namely, that he may be in them 'a Spirit of grace and supplication,' enabling them to draw nigh unto God in a gracious and acceptable manner; Zech. xii. 10, 11. And this is one part of the work that he doth perform, when he is bestowed on them according to the promise; Rom. viii. 26, 27. Let men do their best and utmost, they know not so much as what they ought to pray for, but the Spirit of Christ alone enables them to the whole work. If all the men in the world should lay their heads together, to compose one prayer, for the use of any one saint, but for one day, they were not able to do it, so as that it should answer his wants and conditions; nor can any man do it for himself, without the help and assistance of the Spirit, whose proper work this is.

It were a long work to shew what the Holy Ghost, as a Spirit of grace in the hearts of believers doth, to this end, that they may have in their access unto God, a saving spiritual communion with him in Christ, wherein indeed consists the chiefest head of all the glory and beauty that is in the worship of God. Should I handle it, I must insist upon all these particulars:

(1st.) That the Holy Spirit discovers their wants unto

them, their state and condition, with all the spiritual concernments of their souls, with which, without his effectual working, no man can come to a saving acquaintance spiritually. Men may think it an easy thing to know what they want; but he that knows the difficulty of obedience, the deceitfulness of the heart, the wiles of Satan, the crafts and sleights of indwelling sin, will not think so, but will grant that it is alone to be discovered by the Spirit of grace.

(2dly.) It is he alone which really affecteth the heart and soul with their wants, when they are discovered unto us. We are of ourselves dull and stupid in spiritual things: and when matters of the most inexpressible concernment are proposed, we can pass them by without being affected in any proportion to their weight and importance. The Holy Ghost deeply affects the heart with its spiritual concernments, works sorrow, fear, desire, answerable to the wants that are discerned, making 'intercession with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered.'

(3dly.) It is he alone that can reveal the saving relief and supplies that God hath provided in the promises of the gospel for all the wants of the saints, so enabling them to make their supplications according to the mind of God. It is not the consideration of the letter of the promises, that will discover savingly unto us, the glorious relief that is provided in them for our wants; but it is revealed unto the saints effectually by the Spirit, as provided by the love of the Father, and purchased by the blood of the Son, and stored up for us in the covenant of grace, that we may make our requests for our portions according to the will of God.

(4thly.) It is the Holy Ghost that works in believers faith, love, delight, fervency, watchfulness, perseverance, all those graces that give the soul communion with God in his worship, and in Christ renders their prayers effectual: he doth this radically, by begetting, creating, ingenerating them in the hearts of believers, in the first infusion of the new, spiritual, vital principle with which they are endued when they are born of him; as also by acting, exciting and stirring them up in every duty of the worship of God that they are called unto, so enabling them to act according to the mind of God.

By these hath the soul spiritual communion with God

in the duties of his worship: and these, with sundry other things, should be handled, if we aimed to set out the work of the Spirit in the worship of the gospel, as he is a Spirit of grace and supplication. But the mentioning of them in general is sufficient for the end proposed, namely, to discover the beauty and the glory of the worship that is thus carried on. Herein lies that, which all the beauty of the world fades before, and becomes as a thing of nought, which brings all the outward pomp of ceremonious worship into contempt: I mean the glory and excellency that lies in the spiritual communion of the soul with God, by the grace of the Holy Ghost, in that heavenly intercourse which is between God and his saints in their worship by this means. The Holy Ghost is essentially God himself, blessed for ever in his own person, he comes upon the hearts of the elect, and communicates of his own grace unto them; these graces he enables them to act, exert, and put forth in their worship of God. These God delights in, as coming from himself, as of his own workmanship in us; he seeth a return of himself to himself, of his grace to his glory; and by these do the saints approach into his presence, speak to him, treat with him, and hear from him: it is the language of faith and love alone, and the like graces of his Spirit that God hears in his worship; other voices, cries, and noises he regards not; yea, at least, if not some of them in themselves, yet all of them when these are wanting, are an abomination unto him. However, this is the beauty and the glory of the worship of the gospel, the beauty and glory that God sees in it. Where this work of the Spirit of God is in his worship, there faith, love, delight, and fervency are in a saving and spiritual manner exercised: he is an atheist, who will deny that they are acceptable to God; that this worship is glorious, beautiful, and comely: and he is no better, who thinks that any outward solemnity can render worship so, when these are wanting. So that they are the things on which the whole doth turn.

3dly. As always from the foundation of the world, so in the New Testament, the solemn worship of God is to be performed in the assemblies of his saints and people. Now where the same worship is to be performed by many, the very law of nature and reason requireth that some one, or

more, according as there is necessity, should go before the rest of the assembly in the worship which they have to perform, and be as the hand, or mouth, or eyes to the whole body, or assembly. And so also hath our Lord ordained, namely, that in all the public and solemn worship of gospel assemblies, there should be some appointed to go before them, in the performance of the duties of the worship that he requireth of them, be they what they will. Now as the things themselves, wherein these persons are to minister before the Lord in their assemblies, are all of them prescribed by God himself; so as to the manner of their performance. There are these two marks or guides to direct the whole: first, it must be so performed as to tend to the glory of God: and, secondly, to the edification of the assembly itself. It would be too long for me to shew you what is required to this one thing, that the worship of God be carried on in the assembly to the edification of the saints, which is, that all the ordinances of God may have their proper work in them, and effects towards them, for the increase of their faith and graces, and carrying them on in their course of obedience and communion with God. The consideration of this work made the apostle say, *πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἱκανός*. In a word, so far as possible it may be done, their state and condition is to be spread before the Lord in prayer, according as they experience it in their own souls; their desires to be drawn forth and expressed, their pleas for mercy and grace to be managed with the like ends of prayer; their condition to be suited in instruction, consolation, and exhortation, and the like, in preaching the word; so of all other ordinances, they are to be managed and administered so as may best tend to the edification of the assembly. Now this is supposed by the third benefit that the saints receive by the Spirit, as to their approach unto God: he gives gifts and abilities, spiritual gifts unto them whom he calleth unto this work of going before the assemblies in the worship of God, that they may perform all things to the glory of God, and the edification of the body. I shall not so much as once mention the supplies that are invented and found out by men for this end and purpose. There is not a soul that hath the least communion with God, but knows their emptiness and utter insufficiency for that which they pretend unto.

Now that the Holy Ghost furnisheth men with gifts for this end and purpose, we have abundant testimonies in the Scripture; and blessed be God, we have evidence of it abundantly in and from those who are endued with them, 1 Cor. xii. 4. 7, 8. 11. The design of the apostle in that chapter is to treat of the worship of God, as it is to be carried on and performed in the gospel assemblies of saints, of which he gives an instance in the church of Corinth. For the right performance hereof, he lays down in the first verse, that spiritual gifts are bestowed: being to treat of the public worship of God, he begins with spiritual gifts, whereby men are enabled thereunto. The author of all those gifts he informs us in the fourth verse, is the Holy Ghost; he is sent by Christ to this very end and purpose, to bestow them on his churches. The end of the collation, he informs us, is the profit and edification of the whole body, ver. 7. Every one that receives them, doth it to this purpose, that he may use them to the good and benefit of the whole. To this end are they bestowed in great variety, as ver. 8. that by them the use of the body may be supplied, and church edification may be carried on: and having thus shewed their nature, end, and distribution, he again asserts their author to be the Holy Ghost, ver. 11. And we have direction, upon this foundation, given for the exercise and use of those gifts, in sundry places; as 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11.

This then also, as to the more solemn and public worship of God, is performed by that Spirit in whom we have an access unto the Father: he gives spiritual gifts unto men, enabling them to perform it in a holy evangelical manner, so as God may be glorified, and the assemblies of the saints edified, in the administration of all ordinances, according to what they are appointed unto. He enables men to pray so, as that the souls of the saints may be drawn forth thereby unto communion with God, according unto all their wants and desires: he enables them to preach or speak as the 'oracles of God,' so as that the saints may receive instruction suitable to their condition, as to all the ends of the good word of God, whose dispensation is committed unto them: he enables men to administer the seals of the covenant so, that the faith of the saints may be excited and stirred up to act and exert itself in a way suitable to the nature of each

ordinance; and all those gifts are bestowed on men on purpose for the good and edification of others; they are never exercised in a due manner, but they have a farther reach and efficacy in and upon the souls of the saints, than he that is intrusted with them was able to take a prospect of: he little knows how many of his words and expressions are, in the infinite wisdom of the Holy Ghost, suited in an unspeakable variety to the conditions of his saints; here one, there another, is wrought upon, affected, humbled, melted, lifted up, rejoiced by them, the Holy Ghost making them effectual to the ends for which he hath given out the gifts from whence they do proceed. I might mention sundry other advantages which we have, that belong to our access unto God by one Spirit; but because it were endless to enumerate all particulars, and they may be reduced to some one of these general heads, I shall mention no more of them. This then is the first evidence, that we have in the words, given unto the glory, beauty, and excellency of gospel worship; in it we have an access unto the Father, in the Spirit, which relates unto the things before mentioned, or rather touched on. Here is order; the Spirit reveals the mind of God, as to the worship that is acceptable unto him: he furnishes the souls of the saints with all those graces whereby, and wherein, they have communion with God in his worship: he gives gifts unto some, enabling them to go before the assemblies in the worship of God, according to his mind, and unto their edification. Blessed order, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against! Order, proceeding from the God of order, his own project and appointment. Here is beauty, decency, loveliness; it is all the work of the glorious and Holy Spirit, which is like himself, holy, glorious, and beautiful; and to set up any thing of any man's finding out in competition with it, is that which the Lord's soul abhors.

(2.) As the saints in the gospel have 'access unto God in the Spirit,' so they have all their access 'in one Spirit:' and this is the spring of all the uniformity which God requires. So the apostle tells us, that as to the gifts themselves, there are diversities of them, and difference in them; 1 Cor. xii. 4—6. But where then is uniformity? If one man have better and greater gifts than another; one man be more eminent in one kind, another in another; one excelling

in prayer, another in prophesying and preaching, what confusion must this needs breed? Where is then any uniformity in all this? The apostle answereth, ver. 11. Here lies the uniformity of gospel worship; that though the gifts bestowed on men for the public performance of it be various, and there is great diversity among them, yet it is one Spirit, that bestows them all among them, and that in the order before mentioned: one and the same Spirit discovers the will and worship of God to them all; one and the same Spirit works the same graces for their kind in the hearts of them all; one and the same Spirit bestows the gifts that are necessary for the carrying on of gospel worship in the public assemblies, to them who are called to that work. And what if he be pleased to give out his gifts in some variously, as to particulars, 'dividing to every one severally, as he will?' yet this hindereth not, but that as to the saints mentioned, they all approach unto God by one Spirit, and so have uniformity in their worship throughout the world. This is a catholic uniformity; when whatever is invented by men under that name, reaches but to the next hedge, and, as might be easily proved and evinced, is the greatest principle of deformity and disorder in the world. This then is the uniformity of gospel worship; all the saints everywhere have their access in it unto God in one Spirit, who worketh alike in the general in them all, though he gives out diversities of gifts, serving to the edification of the whole.

And these are the evidences that are directly and 'in terminis' given to the proposition of the beauty, excellency, order, and uniformity, of gospel worship in the text; as we consider it absolutely in itself. Before I come to consider its glory comparatively, in reference to the outward solemn worship of the temple of old, I shall add but one consideration more, which is necessary for the preventing of some objections, as well as for the farther clearing of the truth insisted on; and that is taken from the place where spiritual worship is performed. Much of the beauty and glory of the old worship, according to carnal ordinances, consisted in the excellency of the place wherein it was performed: first, the tabernacle of Moses, then the temple of Solomon, of whose glory and beauty we shall speak afterward. Answerable hereunto, do some imagine, there must be a beauty in

the place where men assemble for gospel worship; which they labour to paint and adorn accordingly. But they 'err, not knowing the Scriptures.' There is nothing spoken of the place and seat of gospel worship, but it is referred to one of these three heads, all which render it glorious.

1. It is performed in heaven; though they who perform it are on earth, yet they do it by faith in heaven. The apostle saith, that believers in their worship do 'enter into the holiest,' which he exhorts them to draw nigh unto; Heb. x. 19. 21. What is the 'holiest' whereunto they enter with their worship? It is that whereunto Jesus Christ is entered as their forerunner; Heb. vi. 20. It is into heaven itself; chap. ix. 24. You will say, How can these things be, that men should enter into heaven while they are here below? I say, Are men 'masters in Israel,' and ask this question? They who have an access unto the immediate presence of God, and to the throne of grace, enter into heaven itself. And this adds to the glory we treat of. What poor low thoughts have men of God and his ways, who think there lies an acceptable glory and beauty in a little paint and varnish? Heaven itself, the place of God's glorious residence, where he is attended with all his holy angels, is the state of this worship. Hence is that glorious description given of it, Rev. iv. throughout; where it is expressly said to be 'in heaven,' though it is only the worship of the church that is described. It were easy from hence to manifest the glory we have spoken of, in the several parts of it. But I do but point out the heads of things.

2. The second thing mentioned, in reference to the place of this worship, is the persons of the saints: these are said to be the 'temple of the Lord;' 1 Cor. vi. 19. Your 'body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God;' chap. iii. 16. 'Know ye not,' ver. 17. 'the temple of God is holy?' God hath now no material temple, but he hath chosen this spiritual one, the hearts and souls of his saints; and beautiful temples they are, being washed with the blood of Christ, beautified with the graces of the Spirit, adorned for communion with him: hence 'the king's daughter is' said to be 'all glorious within;' Psal. xlv. Whatever men may think, God, that knoweth his own graces in the hearts of his, and in whose eyes nothing is beautiful

or of price but grace, knows and judges, that this place of his worship, this temple that he hath chosen, is full of beauty and glory. Let who will be judge, that pretends to be a Christian, whether is more beautiful in the sight of God, 'a living stone' adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, a heart full of the grace of Christ; or a dead stone cut out of the quarries, though graven into the similitude of a man.

3. The assemblies of the saints are spoken of as God's temple, and the seat and place of public, solemn, gospel worship; Eph. ii. 21, 22. Here are many living stones framed into 'an holy house in the Lord, an habitation for God by his Spirit.' God dwells here: as he dwelt in the temple of old, by some outward carnal pledges of his presence; so in the assemblies of his saints, which are his habitation, he dwells unspeakably in a more glorious manner by his Spirit. Here, according to his promise, is his habitation. Now the saints' assemblies, according to the order of the gospel, are 'a building fitly framed together:' as the tabernacle and temple were of old in their outward structure, whereby they were raised; so they in their spiritual union in and under Christ their head. And they are a temple, a holy temple, holy with the holiness of truth, as the apostle speaks; chap. iv. 24. Not a typical, relative, but a real holiness, and such as the Lord's soul delighteth in. I know some can see no beauty in the assemblies of the saints, unless there be an outward beauty and splendour in the fabric and building wherein they convene; but that is not at all the thing in question, what some men can see, or cannot see. Christ himself had unto some 'no form nor comeliness that he should be desired;' no more have his saints, his ways, his worship. That is not it which we inquire after; but what is beautiful, comely, and of price in the eyes and judgment of God. Neither is that the matter in question, whether these or those are saints of God, or no? But only, whether an assembly of saints, as such, which are the temple of God, and being called together according to the order of the gospel, be not a glorious seat of worship? God saith it is so; and if men say otherwise, those that are not inchanted with what I shall not name, will easily know what to give credit to.

Secondly, Proceed we now in the next place to set forth the glory and beauty of this worship of the gospel compara-

tively, with reference to the solemn outward worship, which by God's own appointment was used under the Old Testament; which, as we shall shew, was far more excellent on many accounts than any thing of the like kind; that is, as to outward splendour and beauty, that was ever found out by men: and I shall do this the more willingly, because the Holy Ghost doth so much, and so frequently, and that not without many great and weighty causes, insist upon it in the New Testament, having intimated it beforehand in many places of the Old. To the right understanding of what is gospel, and delivered in Scripture on this account, some things are previously to be considered.

1. As the whole worship of the old church, so the whole manner of it, with all its rites, ceremonies, and ornaments, both in the tabernacle and temple, were of God's own appointment. There was not the least part of the fabric wherein his worship was celebrated, nor any ornament of it, not one rite or ceremony that did attend it, but it was all of it wholly of God's own designation and command. This is known and confessed; Moses made all things 'according to the pattern shewed him in the mount;' and at the finishing of the whole work, it is in one chapter ten times repeated, that he did as the Lord commanded him; Exod. xl. Now surely this gave it a beauty, order, and glory incomparably above whatever the wisest of the sons of men are able to invent. 'Let the potsherd contend with the potsherds of the earth; but woe unto him that contends with his Maker.' The worship of the pope, and his invention, may possibly outdo the beauty and order of the worship of the Turk and his invention; but I hope they will not compare with God, nor make themselves equal with him. But why should I say I hope it, when the contrary is evident? For doth he not undertake to assign new rules of his own in the worship of God? And doth he not therein make himself equal with God, whose prerogative it is, to be the only lawgiver to his people's consciences, and the only prescriber of his own worship? But this I may yet hope, that men will not nakedly aver, that what is of their appointment, is equal unto, and comparable with, what God appoints; take their institutions and God's together, and the former surely will have great disadvantage in respect of the authors. This, in general, I suppose will

be granted, though men be very apt practically to 'make void the commands of God by their traditions' and institutions, laying more weight upon some one of them, than on all the commands of Jesus Christ.

But it may be, though God appointed that worship of old, and all the concernments of it, he intended not to make that beautiful and glorious, but plain and homely; so that it doth not follow that it is beautiful and excellent, because it was by him appointed. Answer, Though we may well and safely abide by this general proposition, that what God hath appointed in his own worship, is therefore beautiful and glorious, excellent, orderly, and comely, because he hath appointed it; yet I add,

2. That it was God's intendment to make, appoint, and dispose of all things so, that the solemnity of his worship might be very beautiful and glorious; he appoints the high priest's garments to be made expressly for glory and beauty, Exod. xxviii. 3. such as might be specious and goodly to look upon; and speaking of the church state, when he had formed and fashioned it by his institution, he saith, 'Her renown went forth among the heathen for beauty, for it was perfect through the comeliness he had put upon her;' Ezek. xvi. 14. There was in her ways of worship a renowned beauty, a perfect comeliness; whence, saith the prophet, 'a glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary;' Jer. xvii. 12. But I shall not need to multiply testimonies to this purpose. Who knows not what things are spoken of the tabernacle, the temple, and all the worship belonging to them, everywhere in the Scripture? As God appointed, so it came to pass; it was the most beautiful solemnity that ever the sun shone upon. Mosaical worship, I say, as celebrated in Solomon's temple, outdid all the glory and splendour that ever the world in any place, in any age from the foundation of it, ever enjoyed; should all the princes of Europe lay their treasures together, they were not able to build a fabric of that charge, magnificence, and glory, as was Solomon's temple. It were endless to go over particulars; the garments of the high priest were such as rendered him so awful and glorious, that Alexander the Great, that famous conqueror of the east, fell down before him with a prostrate reverence. The order of the house, and all the worship in it,

who can fix his mind upon it, without admiration? How glorious was it when the house of Solomon stood in its greatest order and beauty, all overlaid with gold, thousands of priests and Levites ministering in their orders with all the most solemn musical instruments that David found out, and the great congregation assembled of hundreds of thousands, all singing praises to God? Let any man, in his thoughts, a little compare the greatest, most solemn, pompous, and costly worship that any of the sons of men have in these latter days invented and brought into the Christian church, with this of the Judaical, and he shall quickly find that it holds no proportion with it, that it is all a toy, a thing of nought in comparison of it. Take the cathedral of Peter in Rome; bring in the pope and all his cardinals in all their vestments, habiliments, and ornaments; fill their choir with the best singers they can get; set out and adorn their images and pictures to the utmost that their treasures and superstition will reach to, then compare it to Solomon's temple, and the worship thereof; and, without the help of the consideration that the one was from heaven, the other is of men, the very nature of the things themselves will manifest how vain the present pretences are to glory and beauty. How much more may this be spoken of such underling pretenders as some are?

These things being premised, we say now, that notwithstanding this whole worship, and all the concernments of it, was appointed by God himself; notwithstanding it was designed by him to be beautiful and glorious, and that indeed it was the very top of what external beauty and splendour could reach unto; yet that it was no way comparable to the beauty and glory of this spiritual worship of the New Testament; yea, had no glory in comparison of it. This then I shall briefly demonstrate: (1.) In general; and then (2.) By an induction of some particular instances.

For the former I need go no farther than that place where the apostle doth expressly handle this comparion, viz. 2 Cor. iii. 7—10. He doth here on set purpose compare the ministration of the law in the letter with all its outward legal worship, rites, and ceremonies, with the administration of the gospel in the Spirit, and the worship of God attending thereon. And first, he acknowledgeth that the old ministration was

very glorious, which he either gives an instance of, or proves it by that of Moses's face shining when he came down from the mount, when he had received the law, and the pattern of all that worship which he was to appoint unto that church. It seems, that God left that shining on the face of Moses, which was such, that the people could not bear the brightness of it, to testify how glorious that was about which he had received revelation; so that indeed, saith the apostle, that ministration was glorious, very glorious, yea, glory in the abstract, ver. 9. nothing was there ever in the world to be compared with it; we will then compare it now with the ministration of the Spirit, and the worship of God under the gospel. It may be he will say, it is not all out so glorious indeed; nay, but he goes farther and tells us, that this doth so excel in glory, comeliness, and excellency, that in respect unto it, the other had no glory at all. What then may be said of any thing invented by men in the worship of God for glory and beauty? I dare not say what the apostle saith of that which God himself appointed, that it hath any glory and beauty in itself; but yet suppose it hath so; let men esteem it as glorious and beautiful as they can possibly fancy it to be, yet, unless the same veil be on their minds in reading the gospel, which is 'on the Jews in reading Moses,' they cannot but see and acknowledge, that it hath no glory in comparison of that spiritual worship which we have described.

Some particular instances will make the general comparison more evident. I shall only name these three, which being the principal spring of all the beauty, glory, and order of the worship of old, are peculiarly considered by the apostle to this very purpose, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he sets out the excellency of the evangelical administrations of the covenant and worship of God, above and beyond the legal.

1. The first of these was the temple, the seat of all the solemn outward worship of the old church; the beauty and glory of it were in part spoken to before; nor shall I insist on any particular description of it; it may suffice, that it was the principal state of the beauty and order of the Judaical worship, and which rendered all exceeding glorious, so far,

that the people idolized it, and put their trust in it, that upon the account of it they should be assuredly preserved, notwithstanding their presumptuous sins: and indeed, it had such blessings and promises annexed unto it, that if there were at this day any place or house in the world that had the like, I should desire to be among the first that should enter into a pilgrimage of going to it, though it were as far beyond Jerusalem, as it is thither. But yet, notwithstanding all this, Solomon himself, in his prayer at the dedication of that house, 1 Kings viii. 27. seems to intimate, that there was some check upon his spirit, considering the unanswerableness of the house to the great majesty of God: it was a house on the earth, a house that he did build with his hands, intimating that he looked farther to a more glorious house than that. And what is it, if it be compared with the temple of gospel worship? Whatever is called the temple now of the people of God, is as much beyond that of old, as spiritual things are beyond carnal, as heavenly beyond earthly, as eternal beyond temporal. First, In some sense the body of Christ is our temple, as himself called it, speaking of 'the temple of his body,' as being prefigured by it, as having the 'fulness of the Godhead dwelling' in him, typified by the presence of God in the old temple, and being the centre wherein all his people meet with their worship of God, as those of old did in the temple. And surely there is no comparison for beauty and excellency between the house that Solomon built, and the Son of God, 'who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.' Again, The persons, and the assemblies of the saints, as I shewed before, are a temple to God under the gospel. They are his body, Eph. i. 23. and his house, Heb. iii. 6. Nor is the old temple, made of wood and stones, gold and silver, to be compared with this living house, washed with the blood of Christ, adorned with the real graces of the Spirit, and garnished with all the choice jewels of God's eternal love. They are God's delight, 'the first-fruits of the creature' to him, the spouse of Christ, through his graces altogether lovely. The Lord Jesus sees more beauty and glory in the weakest assemblies of his saints coming together in his name, and acted and guided in his worship and ways by his Spirit, than

ever was in all the worship of Solomon's temple when it was in its glory. Thirdly, Heaven itself, the holy place not made with hands, is also the saints' temple under the gospel. Believers have in their worship an open way into the holiest, made for them by Christ, who entered into it as the forerunner, Heb. vi. 20. opening it to them, also giving admission into it; chap. x. 19—21. And how exceedingly doth this exalt the excellency of the spiritual worship of the gospel? What was the glory of Solomon's temple, to the glory of the meanest star in heaven? How much less was it then in comparison of the glorious presence of God in the highest heavens, whither believers enter with all their worship, even where Christ sits at the right hand of God?

2. The second spring of the beauty of the old worship, which was indeed the hinge upon which the whole turned, was the priesthood of Aaron, with all the administrations committed to his charge. The pomp, state, and ceremonies, that the Papists have invented in their outward worship, or that heap which they have in several parcels borrowed of the heathen and Jews, is a toy in comparison of the magnificence of the Aaronical administrations. The high priest under the gospel, is Christ alone. Now I shall spare the pains of comparing these together, partly because it will be by all confessed, that Christ is incomparably more excellent and glorious; and partly, because the apostle on set purpose handles this comparison in sundry instances in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where any one may run and read it, it being the main subject matter of that most excellent epistle.

3. The order, glory, number, significancy, of their sacrifices, was another part of their glory. And indeed, he that shall seriously consider that one solemn anniversary sacrifice of expiation and atonement, which is instituted, Lev. xvi. will quickly see, that there was very much glory and solemnity in the outward ceremony of it. But now, saith the apostle, 'we have a better sacrifice;' Heb. ix. 23. We have him who is the high priest, and altar, and sacrifice, all himself; of worth, value, glory, beauty, upon the account of his own person, the efficacy of his oblation, the real effect of it, more than a whole creation, if it might have been all offered up at one sacrifice. This is the standing sacrifice of

the saints, offered 'once for all,' as effectual now any day, as if offered every day; and other sacrifices, properly so called, they have none. I might mention other particulars; but I suppose, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have in some measure manifested the excellency, beauty, order and uniformity, of the spiritual worship of the gospel, and that both absolutely in itself, and in comparison with any other way of worship whatever. From all which it will be easily made to appear, that this may well be reckoned among the unspeakable privileges that are purchased for us by the death of Christ, which was the thing first proposed to consideration.

SERMON XX.

OF WALKING HUMBLY WITH GOD.

And to walk humbly with thy God.—MICAH vi. 8.

THE beginning of this chapter contains a most pathetical expostulation of God, by the prophet with his people, about their sins and unworthy walking before him. Having with an apostrophe to the mountains and hills, ver. 1, 2. stirred up their attention, and raised them to the consideration of his plea with them, in ver. 3—5. he emphatically presses them with the mercies he had of old bestowed upon them, with the patience and love toward them, which he shewed and exercised in his dealings with them.

The conviction being effectual to awaken them, and fill them with a sense of their horrible ingratitude and rebellions, ver. 6, 7. they begin to make inquiry, according as is the custom of persons under the power of conviction, what course they shall take to avoid the wrath of God, which they could not but acknowledge was due to them. And here, as God speaks, Hos. vii. 1. when he would heal them, their iniquity and wickedness is discovered more and more; they discover the wretched principles whereon they were acted in all that they had to do with God.

Indeed convictions, on what account soever, made effectual upon the soul, draw out its inward principles, which are not otherwise to be discovered. Many there are, who have in notion received the doctrine of free justification by the blood of Christ, whom, while they are secure in their ways, without trouble or distress, it is impossible to persuade, that they do not live and act upon that principle, and walk before God in the strength of it. Let any great conviction from the word, or by any imminent or pressing danger, befall these men, then their hearts are laid open; then all their hopes are in their repentance, amendment of life, performance of duties in a better manner; and the iniquity of their self-righteousness is discovered.

Thus was it with these Jews; their sins being charged home upon them by the prophet, so that they are not able to stand under their weight and burden; he now discovers the bottom of all their principles in dealing with God, and that is this, that having provoked him, something they must do, whereby to appease him, and atone his anger.

In their contrivance to this purpose, they fix on two general heads. First, They propose things which God himself had appointed; ver. 5. 6. Secondly, Things of their own finding out, which they supposed might have a farther and better efficacy to the end aimed at, than any thing appointed of God himself; ver. 6.

First, They look to sacrifices and burnt-offerings for help; they consider, whether by them, and on their account, they may not come before the Lord, and bow themselves before the high God; that is, perform such a worship, for which they may be acquitted from the guilt of their sins.

Sacrifices were a part of the worship of God, appointed by himself, and acceptable to him, when offered in faith according to his mind; yet we find God frequently rejecting them in the Old Testament, whilst yet their institution was in force, and themselves good in their kind. Now this rejection of them was not absolute, but with respect to somewhat that vitiated the service in them. Among these, two were most eminent:

1. When they were rested in, as the matter and cause of their justification and acceptation with God, beyond their typical virtue.

2. When they were relied on to countenance men in the neglect of moral duties, or to continue in any way of sin.

Both these evils attended this appeal of the Jews unto their sacrifices: they did it first to please God, or appease God, that on their account they might be freed from the guilt of sin, and be accepted: and then to countenance themselves in their immoralities and wickedness, as is evident from the prophet's reply, ver. 7. calling them from their vain confidence in sacrifices, to justice, judgment, mercy, and humble walking with God. But,

Secondly, They find this will not do; conscience will not be satisfied, nor peace be obtained by any performance

of these ordinary duties, though they should engage in them in an extraordinary manner; no, though they could bring thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil. Though men attempt never so vigorously, in never so extraordinary a manner, to quiet their souls, terrified with the guilt of sin, by any duties whatever, it will not do, the work will not be accomplished, therefore they will make farther attempts: if nothing that God hath appointed will reach the end they aim at, because they were never appointed by him for that end, they will invent or use some way of their own, that may appear to be of more efficacy than the other: 'Shall I give my first-born for my transgression?'

The rise and occasion of such sacrifices as here are mentioned, the sacrificing of men, of men's sacrificing their own children; the use of such sacrifices, throughout the world, among all nations; the craft and cruelty of Satan in imposing them on poor, sinful, guilty creatures, with the advantages which he had so to do, I have elsewhere declared. For the present I shall only observe two things in the state and condition of convinced persons, when pressed with their sins, and a sense of the guilt of them, who are ignorant of the righteousness of God in Christ.

1. They have a better opinion of their own ways and endeavours, for the pleasing of God, and quieting their consciences, than of any thing of God's institution, or the way by him appointed for that end. This is the height that they rise to, when they have fixed on what is most glorious in their own eyes. Tell a Papist, who is convinced of sin, of the blood of Christ, it is folly to him. Penances, satisfaction, purgatory, intercession of the church in the mass, have much more desirableness in them: these Eliabs must wear the crown. The case is the same with innumerable poor souls at present, who hope to find more relief in their own duties and amendment of life, than in the blood of Christ, as to the appeasing of God, and obtaining of peace.

2. There is nothing so horrid, desperate, irksome, or wicked, that convinced persons will not engage to do under their pressure on the account of the guilt of sin; they will burn their children in the fire, whilst the cries of their conscience outcry the lamentation of their miserable infants:

which, as it argues the desperate blindness that is in man by nature, choosing such abominations, rather than that way which is the wisdom of God; so also, the terrors that possess poor souls convinced of sin, that are unacquainted with the only remedy.

This being the state and condition of these poor creatures, the prophet discovers to them their mistake and desperate folly in the verse of my text.

Two things are contained in this verse: the one is implied; the other expressed in words.

First, Here is something implied, and that is a reproof of the error and mistake of the Jews: they thought sacrifices were appointed for the appeasing of God by their performance of them; and that this was their business in their worship, by their duty in performance of them, to make satisfaction for the guilt of sin. This the prophet calls them from, telling them, that is not their business, their duty, God hath provided another way to make reconciliation and atonement; it is a thing above their power; their business is to walk with God in holiness; for the matter of atonement that lies on another hand: 'He hath shewed thee, O man, what he requireth of thee:' he expects not satisfaction at thy hands, but obedience on the account of peace made.

Secondly, What is expressed is this, that God prefers moral worship, in the way of obedience, to all sacrifices whatever, according to the determination afterward approved by our Saviour; Mark xii. 33. 'What doth the Lord require of thee?'

Now this moral obedience he refers to three heads: 'Doing justly; loving mercy; and walking humbly with God.'

How the two first are comprehensive of our whole duty in respect of men, containing in them the sum and substance of the second table, I shall not stay to declare.

It is the third head that I have fixed on, which peculiarly regards the first table, and the moral duties thereof.

Concerning this I shall do these three things:

I. I shall shew what it is to walk with God.

II. What it is to walk humbly with God.

III. Prove this proposition: Humble walking with God,

as our God in covenant, is the great duty, and most valuable concernment of believers.

I. As to our walking with God, some things are required to it; and some things are required in it.

1. Some things are required to it. As,

(1.) Peace and agreement. Amos iii. 3. 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' And he tells us, that walking with God, when there is no peace with him, is like walking in a forest, where, and when the lion roareth, ver. 8. when a man can have no thoughts but what are full of expectation of his immediately being torn asunder and devoured. So God threateneth to deal with them that pretend to walk with him, and yet are not at peace with him; Psal. l. 22. 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' Who are these? Those to whom he speaks, ver. 16. 'But to the wicked, says God:' the exceptive, 'but,' distinguishes them from those of whom he spoke before, ver. 5. who had made a covenant with him by sacrifice, and so obtained peace in the blood of Christ. When Cain and Abel went into the field together, and were not agreed, the issue was, that the one slew the other. When Joram met Jehu in the field, he cried, 'Is it peace?' And finding by his answer, that they were not agreed, he instantly flew, and cried out for his life. 'Agree,' saith our Saviour, 'with thine adversary whilst thou art in the way,' lest the issue be sad to thee.

You know at what enmity God and man do stand, whilst he is in the state of nature. They are 'alienated from God by wicked works; are enemies,' and their 'carnal mind is enmity to him,' Rom. viii. 7. and 'his wrath abideth on them;' John iii. 36. they are 'children of his wrath;' Eph. ii. 3. Were I to pursue this head in particulars, I could manifest from the rise and first breath, from the consideration of the parties at variance, the various ways of managing of it, and its issue, that this is the saddest enmity that can possibly be apprehended. You know also, what our peace and agreement with God is, and whence it doth arise. Christ 'is our peace;' Eph. ii. 14. He 'hath made an end of the difference about sin;' Dan. ix. 24. He 'hath made peace' for us with God, and by our interest in him, we, 'who

were afar off, are made nigh,' and obtain peace; Rom. v. 1. Eph. ii. 14, 15.

This then, I say, in the first place, is required to our walking with God, that we are at peace with him, and agreement in the blood of Christ; that we are by faith actually interested in the atonement; that our persons are accepted, as the foundation of the acceptation of our duties. Without this, every attempt for walking with God in obedience, or the performance of any duties, is,

[1.] Fruitless: all that men do is lost. 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;' their holy things are dung, which God will remove. In all their duties they labour in the fire; not any of their works shall turn to their eternal account: God looks on all their duties as the gifts of enemies, that are selfish, deceitful, and of all things to be abhorred. Such men may have their reward in this life; but as to what they aim at, their pains are lost, their hearing is lost, their alms are lost; all is fruitless.

[2.] Presumptuous: they put themselves upon the company of God, who hates them, and is hated by them; Psal. l. 16. 'But to the wicked, says God.' This is God's language to them in their duties, Thou bold presumptuous rebel, what hast thou to do to take my name in thy mouth? Why dost thou howl thus before me, and offer swine's blood in my presence? How camest thou hither not having a wedding garment? I hate thy most solemn oblations. Indeed it will be found at the issue, that intolerable presumption lies at the bottom of all unregenerate men's attempts to walk with God. They count it a slight thing to do so: they deal with him as one that took very little notice how he is dealt withal.

This, I say, is the first thing required to our walking with God, that we be at peace and agreement with him, in the blood of Christ. And as the psalmist says, 'Consider this, ye that know not God,' who have not made a covenant with him, in and by the sacrifice of his Son. You meet him in the field, you put yourselves upon his company, you pretend to walk with him in these duties, and those other, which custom, education, conviction, or self-righteousness puts you upon; in every one of them you provoke him to his face to destroy you. You seem to flatter him, that you

are agreed, when he declares that you are at enmity. Let a man deal thus with his ruler; conspire against his crown and dignity; attempt his death; despise his authority; reproach his reputation; and then when he is proclaimed rebel and traitor, and condemned to die, let him come into his presence, as in former days, and deal with him as a good subject, offer him gifts and presents; shall he think to escape? Will he not be seized on, and delivered over to punishment?

Every man, in his natural estate, is a rebel against God: thou hast rejected his authority, conspired his ruin, the ruin of his kingdom, art proclaimed by him a traitor and rebel, art sentenced to eternal death: is it for thee now to meet him, to go and flatter him with thy mouth, and fawn upon him in thy other duties? Will he not remember thy rebellions, despise thy offerings, command thee out of his presence into bonds and prison, abhor thy gifts? What canst thou else expect at his hands? This is the best and utmost of their condition in their obedience, who are not interested in Christ: and the more earnest and zealous you are, the more ready in the performance of duties, the more do you put yourselves on him, and his company, who hates you upon the justest grounds in the world, and is ready to destroy you.

(2.) The second previous thing, is, oneness of design. For persons occasionally to fall into the company of one another, and so to pass on together for a little season, doth not suffice for them to be said to walk together. Oneness of aim and design is required to it.

The aim of God, in general, is his own glory: he makes all things for himself, Prov. xvi. 4. Rev. iv. 11. in particular, as to the business of our walking with him, it is 'the praise of his glorious grace;' Eph. i. 6.

Now, in this aim of God to exalt his glorious grace, two things are considerable: First, That all which is to be looked for at the hand of God, is upon the account of mere grace and mercy; Tit. iii. 4, 5. God aims at the exalting of his glory in this, that he may be known, believed, magnified, as a God pardoning iniquity and sin. And, secondly, That the enjoyment of himself, in this way of mercy and grace, is that great reward of him, that walks with him. So God

tells Abraham, when he calls him to walk before him, 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;' Gen. xv. 1. The enjoyment of God in covenant, and the good things therein freely promised and bestowed by him, is the exceeding great reward of them that walk with God. This also, then, is required of him that will walk with God, that he hath the same design in his so doing, as God hath; that he aims in all his obedience at the glory of God's grace, and the enjoyment of him as his exceeding great reward.

Now, according to what was before said of the design of God, this may be referred unto three heads.

[1.] In general: that the design of the person be the glory of God. 'Whatever we do,' saith the apostle, that is, in our worship of God, and walking with him, 'let all be done to his glory.' Men, who in their obedience have base, low, unworthy ends, walk as contrary to God in their obedience, as in their sins. Some serve him for custom; some for an increase of corn, wine, or oil, or the satisfying of some low earthly end; some aim at self and reputation; all is lost: it is not walking with God, but warring against him.

[2.] To exalt the glory of God's grace. This is one part of the ministry of the gospel, that in obedience we should seek to exalt the glory of grace. The first natural tendency of obedience, was to exalt the glory of God's justice. The new covenant hath put another end upon our obedience, it is to exalt free grace; grace given in Christ, enabling us to obey; grace accepting our obedience being unworthy; grace constituting this way of walking with God; and grace crowning its performance.

[3.] Aiming at the enjoyment of God, as our reward. And this cuts off the obedience of many from being a walking with God. They perform duties indeed; but what sincerity is there in their aims for the glory of God? Is it almost once taken into their thoughts? Is not the satisfaction of conscience, the escape of hell and wrath, the sole aim they have in their obedience? Is it of concernment to them that the glory of God be exalted? Do they care indeed what becomes of his name or ways, so they may be saved? Especially, how little is the glory of his grace aimed at? Men are destroyed by a self-righteousness, and have nothing of a gospel obedience in them. Look on the praying and

preaching of some men; is it not evident that they walk not with God therein, seek not his glory, have no zeal for it, no care for his name; but rest in the discharge of the duty itself?

(3.) That a man may walk with another, it is required that he have a living principle in him to enable him thereunto. Dead men cannot walk; or if they do, acted by any thing but their own vital principle, and essential form, they are a terror to their companions, not a comfort in their communion. For a dead carcase, or a trunk, to be moved up and down, is not walking. Hence this is everywhere laid down as the principle of our obedience, that we 'who were dead are quickened;' that 'the law of the Spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death;' Rom. viii. 2. That we may walk with God, a principle of a new life is required; that we may have power for it, and be pressed to it from that which is within us. Had not a man rather walk alone, than to have a dead carcase taken out of a grave, and acted by an external force and power, to accompany him?

This, I say, is a third consideration. The matter of our walking with God, consists, as shall be shewed, in our obedience, in our performance of duties required. In this, we are all, more or less, engaged; yea, so far, that perhaps it is hard to discover who walks fastest, and with most appearance of strength and vigour. But alas! How many dead souls have we walking amongst us?

[1.] Are there none who are utter strangers to a new spiritual life; a life from above, hid with Christ in God, a life of God; that mock almost at these things, at least that can give no account of any such life in them; that think it strange it should be required of them, that they should give any account of this life, or being begotten again by the Spirit; yea, that make it a most ridiculous thing? What then is it they will yet plead for themselves? Why do they not walk with God? Is not their conversation good and blameless? Who can charge them with any thing? Do they not perform the duties required of them? But friend: Would it be acceptable to thee, to have a dead man taken out of his grave, and carried along with thee in thy way? All thy services, thy company, is no other to God: he smells nothing but a noisome steam from thy presence with him: thy hear-

ing, praying, duties, meditations, they are on this account all an abomination to him. Tell me not of thy conversation: if it be from a pure conscience, that is, a conscience purified in the blood of Christ, and faith unfeigned, which is the life, or a fruit of it, whereof we are speaking, it is glorious, and commendable; if from other principles, the Lord abhors it.

[2.] Are there none, who are acted in their obedience and duties, not from inward principles, and spiritualized faculties, but merely from outward considerations and external impressions? The apostle tells us, how believers 'grow' and 'go on to perfection;' Eph. iii. 16. Col. i. 19. Christ is the head; from him, by the Spirit, into every joint and sinew is derived an influence of life, that the body may thereby, and therewith, go on towards perfection. How is it with sundry others? They are set upon their feet by custom or conviction: one joint is supplied by repute, another by fear and shame, a third by self-righteousness, a fourth by the lash of conscience; and so they are driven on by a mere external impress. And these are the principles of the obedience of many. By such things as these are they acted in their walking with God. Do you suppose you shall be accepted? Or that peace will be your latter end? I fear many that hear me this day, may be in this condition. Pardon me if I am jealous with a godly jealousy: what means else that hatred of the power of godliness, that darkness in the mystery of the gospel, that cursed formality, that enmity to the Spirit of God, that hatred of reformation, that is found amongst us?

Use. If there be so many things required to walking with God, to fit men for it; and many who do strive to walk with him, are yet lost from a defect of them in the midst of their obedience and performance of duties; what will become of them? Where shall they appear who never once attempted to walk with him; who are wrought upon by no considerations to make it their business so to do? I speak not only of those amongst us, young and old, whose pride, folly, idleness, debauchery, profaneness, hatred of the ways of God, testify to their faces, to all the world, to the shame and danger of the places wherein they live, that they are servants to sin, and walk contrary to God, who also will walk contrary to them, until they are no more. I speak not, I say, of such

as these, who are judged of all: nor yet only of those who are kept to outward observances, merely on the account of the discipline of the place, and the hopes which they have laid up in it, for their outward good, with such other carnal aims: but of some also who ought to be leaders of others, and examples to that flock that is amongst us. What endeavours to walk with God are found upon them, or seen in their ways? Vanity, pride in themselves, families, and relations; yea, scoffing at religion and the ways of God, are the examples some give. I wish worldliness, selfishness, hardness, and straitness of bowels, with open vanity, do not eat up all humble walking with God, as to the power of it in others.

The vanity of the highest profession, without this humble walking, which is another deceit, shall be afterward spoken unto.

For the present, let me speak to them of whom I have spoken somewhat already. If many shall cry, 'Lord, Lord,' and not be heard; if 'many shall strive to enter, and shall not;' what will be their lot and portion? Poor creatures! You know not the condition of your souls; you 'cry peace, and sudden destruction is at hand.' Take heed, lest the multitude of sermons and exhortations you have, make you not like the men that dwell by the falls of mills, deaf with their continual noise. God sends his messengers sometimes to make men deaf; Isa. vi. 5. 7. If that be your portion it will be sad with you. Give me leave to ask you two or three questions, and I have done.

1. Do you not please yourselves, some of you, in your ways, and that with contempt of others? Do you not think they are fools, or envious, or hypocrites, or factious, that reprove you; and scorn them in your hearts? Do you not rather love, honour, imitate, such as never pressed you, nor will, to this business of a new life, to walk with God, and so suppose the times ruined, since this new fangled preaching came up amongst you; desiring to hear things finely spoken, and fopperies of men ignorant of God and themselves? Or,

2. Do you not relieve yourselves with the help of profligate souls, that you will be better, you will repent when the

season is better suited for it, and your present condition is changed? Or,

3. Do not some of you labour to put far from you all thoughts of these things? 'Amici, dum vivimus, vivamus.' It will be well enough with us, though we add drunkenness to thirst? Do not, I say, one, or all of these rotten, corrupted principles lie at the bottom of your loose walking with God? Take heed, I beseech you, lest the Lord tear you in pieces.

SERMON XXI.

HAVING told you what things are previously required to our walking with God;

2. Our next inquiry is, as to the matter or thing itself: what it is to walk with God.

The expression itself is very frequent in Scripture, both as to the examples of them that did so, and as to precepts for others so to do.

It is said of Enoch, that he 'walked with God;' Gen. v. 24. And 'Noah walked with God;' Gen. vi. 9. 'Hezekiah walked before God;' Isa. xxxviii. 3. Abraham is commanded to walk with God, Gen. xvii. 1. yea, and the same thing is almost a hundred times in the Scriptures, with some little variation, so expressed. Sometimes we are said 'to walk with God;' sometimes 'to walk before him;' sometimes, 'to follow after him, to follow hard after him;' sometimes 'to walk in his ways;' all to the same purpose.

The expression you know is metaphorical; by an allusion taken from things natural, spiritual things are expressed therein.

Not to press the metaphor beyond its principal intention, nor to insist on all particulars, wherein any thing of allusion may be found, nor yet insist on the proof of that which is owned and acknowledged: Walking with God in general, consisteth in the performance of that obedience, for matter and manner, which God, in the covenant of grace, requires at our hands.

I shall only manifest unto you some few of the chief con-

cernments of this obedience, which give life and significancy to the metaphor, and so pass on.

(1.) That our obedience be walking with God, it is required that we be in covenant with him, and that the obedience be required in the tenour of that covenant.

This, as to the matter of it, was spoken to before, under the head of what was required to this walking with God; namely, that we have peace and agreement with him. Here it is formally considered, from that expression, 'with God,' as the spring and rule of our obedience. Therefore this expression is comprehensive of the whole duty of the covenant on our part, as Gen. xvii. 1. 'I am God Almighty,' or 'All-sufficient;' that is, unto thee I will be so. As this is comprehensive of the whole of the covenant on the part of God, that he will be unto us an all-sufficient God: so the words that follow are comprehensive of the whole of our duty, 'Walk before me;' which are exegetically explained in the next words, 'and be thou perfect.' The covenant, the agreement that is between God and us, in Christ, wherein he promises to be our God, and we give up ourselves to be his people, is the bottom and spring of that obedience, which is walking with God; i. e. at an agreement with him, in covenant with him; with whom, out of covenant, we have no commerce.

(2.) It is an obedience according to the tenour of that covenant, wherein we are agreed with God. Walking with God according to the tenour of the covenant of works was, 'Do this and live.' The state is now changed. The rule now is that of Gen. xvii. 1. 'Be thou perfect,' or upright 'before me,' in all the obedience I require at thy hands.

Now there are sundry things required, to our walking with God in obedience, so that it may answer the tenour of the covenant wherein we are agreed.

[1.] That it proceed from faith in God, by Christ the Mediator. Faith in God, in general, is, and must be the principle of all obedience, in what covenant soever; Heb. xi. 6. But faith in God, through Christ the Mediator, is the principle of that obedience, which according to the tenour of the new covenant, is accepted. Hence it is called 'the obedience of faith;' Rom. i. 5. i. e. of faith in God by

Christ, as the foregoing and following words evince. His blood is the blood of this covenant; Heb. ix. 15. x. 29. The covenant itself is confirmed and ratified thereby: and by the blood of that covenant, do we receive what we receive, from God; Zech. ix. 11. Hence, whenever God makes mention of the covenant to Abraham, and stirs him up to the obedience that is required in it, he still mentions 'the seed,' i. e. 'Christ,' saith the apostle, Gal. iii. 16. As it is said in general, that 'he that comes to God, must believe that he is;' so in particular, as to the new covenant, Christ says of himself, 'I am the way:' there is no going to the Father but by him; John xiv. 6. They who have believed in God, must be careful to maintain good works, Tit. iii. 8. i. e. they who have believed in God, through Christ. If in our obedience we walk with God, according to the tenour of the new covenant, that obedience ariseth from justifying faith; that is, faith in God, through Christ.

[2.] That it be perfect; that is, that the person be perfect or upright therein: 'Walk before me and be thou perfect;' Gen. xvii. 1. It was said of Noah, that he was 'perfect in his generation,' Gen. vi. 9. as it is also said of many others. David bids us 'mark the perfect man,' Psal. xxxvii. 37. that is, the man that walketh with God, according to the tenour of the new covenant. And our Saviour calling for this obedience, commands us to 'be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect;' Matt. v. 28.

Now there is a twofold perfection.

1st. There is a Τελείωσις, a consummation in righteousness. So it is said of the law, that it 'made nothing perfect,' Heb. vii. 19. or brought nothing to perfect righteousness. And the 'sacrifices made not the comers unto God, by them perfect;' Heb. x. 1. They could not τελειῶσαι, consummate the work of righteousness, which was aimed at. In this sense, we are said to be perfect, 'complete' in Christ, Col. ii. 10. and as it is said in another case, Ezek. xvi. 14. our beauty is 'perfect' through his comeliness. This is the perfection of justification, whereof we speak not.

2dly. There is a perfection within us. Now this also is twofold. A complete perfection of enjoyment; and a perfection of tendency towards enjoyment.

(1st.) In respect of the first; Paul says he was not made

perfect, Phil. iii. 12. and tells us where, and by whom it is obtained; Heb. xii. 23. 'The spirits of just men made perfect.' Just men are not thus made perfect, until their spirits be brought into the presence of God. This perfection is the aim of Christ's redemption, Eph. v. 25, 26. and of all their obedience; Eph. iv. 14. But this is not the perfection which the covenant requires, but which it tends and brings to, whilst by the promise of it, we are carried on in the work of 'perfecting holiness in the fear of God;' 2 Cor. vii. 1. See Job ix. 20.

(2dly.) There is also a perfection of tendency to this end. So Noah is said to be perfect, and Job perfect, and God commands Abraham to be perfect, and David describes the happy condition of the perfect man. Concerning this, observe,

[1st.] There is no word in the Scripture whereby this perfection, and being perfect, is expressed, that in its use is restrained to such an absolute perfection, as should admit of no mixture of failing or defect. The word used concerning Noah, and in the terms of the covenant to Abraham, is תמים of תם from תמם which hath various significations. When spoken in the abstract, as תם is often used, it signifies, 'simplicity of manners,' without craft, which, in the New Testament, is *ἀκακία*. So Jacob is said to be תם איש Gen. xxv. 27. which we have rendered, 'a plain man,' that is, plain-hearted, without guile, as Christ speaks of Nathaniel. Of this sense of the word, you have a notable example, 1 Kings xxii. 34. where the man that slew Ahab, is said to draw a bow, לתמו 'in his simplicity,' which we have rendered, 'at a venture,' that is, without any pernicious design, in particular. So Job ix. 21. תם is opposed to רשע, that is, to him that is 'unquiet, malicious,' and 'perverse.' Such a man in the New Testament, is said to be *ἀνεγκλήτος* and *ἄμωμος*, that is, 'one that cannot be justly blamed,' or reproved, 'for dealing perversely.' Many other instances might be given. The word ישר, which we have commonly rendered, 'upright,' is used also to this purpose: but it is so known, that this word in its use in the Scripture, goes no farther than 'integrity,' nor reaches to an absolute perfection, that I shall not need to insist on it.

The words used in the New Testament are chiefly *τέλειος*

and ἄρτιος, neither of which, in their use, is restrained to this perfection. Hence, James saith, he is τέλειος 'who bridles his tongue;' Jam. iii. 2. The word is but once used positively of any man in an indefinite sense, and that is, 1 Cor. ii. 6. where it evidently denotes, only men of some growth in the knowledge of the mystery of the gospel. But I shall not farther pursue the words.

[2dly.] Two things are contained in this perfection of obedience that is required in our walking with God in the new covenant. The first whereof regards our obedience; the second, the persons obeying.

1*st*. The perfection that respects the obedience itself, or our objective perfection, is that of parts, or the whole of the will and counsel of God, as to our obedience. The law or will of God, concerning our obedience, is perfect; it hath an integrity in it; and we must have respect to all the parts of it that are revealed to us. So David; 'I have a respect unto all thy commandments; Psal. cxix.6. See Jam. ii. 10.

2*dly*. Subjective perfection, in respect of the person obeying, is his sincerity and freedom from guile, the uprightness of his heart in his obedience. And this is that which is mainly intended in that expression of 'being perfect;' being upright, without guile, hypocrisy, false, or selfish ends, in singleness and simplicity of heart, doing the whole will of God.

This then, I say, is that perfection of obedience which makes it walking with God. Whatever comes short of this, if the heart be not upright, without guile, free from hypocrisy and self-ends, if the obedience be not universal, it is not walking with God. This is a perfection in a tendency to that which is complete; which Paul wished for the Corinthians, 2 Cor. xiii. 9. and which he exhorted the Hebrews to, chap. vi. 3. if we fail in this, or come short of this perfection, by any guile of our hearts, by voluntary retaining any sweet morsel under our tongue, by keeping a knee for Baal, or a bow for Rimmon, we walk not with God. It is sad to think, how many lose all they do or have wrought by coming short in this perfection; one vile lust or other, love of the world, pride, ambition, idleness, hardheartedness, may lose all, spoil all; and men walk contrary to God, when they think they walk most with him.

(3.) That our obedience may be walking with God, it is required that it be a constant, progressive motion towards a mark before us. Walking is a constant progress. He that is walking towards a place that he hath in his eye, may stumble sometimes, yea, perhaps, and fall also; but yet, whilst his design and endeavour lies towards the place aimed at, whilst he lies not still when he falls, but gets up again and presses forward, he is still, from the chief aim of his acting, said to walk that way. But now, let this man sit down, or lie down in the way, you cannot say he is walking; much less can you say, that he is walking that way, if he walk quite contrary. So is it in that obedience which is walking with God: 'I press forwards,' saith the apostle, 'to the mark;' Phil. iii. 14. 'I follow after it;' Phil. iii. 12. And he bids us 'so run that we may obtain.' There is a constant pressing forwards required in our obedience. Saith David, 'I follow hard after God.' The enjoyment of God in Christ is the mark before us; our walking is a constant pressing towards it. To fall into, yea, perhaps, fall under a temptation, hinders not but that a man may still be said to be walking, though he makes no great speed, and though he defiles himself by his fall. It is not every omission of a duty, it is not every commission of sin that utterly cuts off in the performance of the duty: but to sit down and give over, to engage in a way, a course of sin; this is that which is called walking contrary to God, not with him.

(4.) Walking with God, is to walk always as under the eye of God. Hence it is called 'walking before him,' before his face, in his sight. The performance of all duties of obedience, as under the eye of God, is required unto this walking with him.

Now there are two ways whereby a man may do all things as under the eye of God.

[1.] By a general apprehension of God's omniscience and presence, as 'all things are open and naked before him;' Heb. iv. 12. on this consideration, that he knows all things, that his understanding is infinite, that nothing can be hid from him, that there is no flying out of his presence, Psal. xiii. 7. nor hiding from him, the darkness being light to him. Men may have a general persuasion, that they are

under the eye of God; and this is in the thoughts of all; I do not say actually, but in respect of the principle of it, that lies in them, which, if it may freely act itself, will make them know it, and consider it; Psal. xciv. 9. Job xxiv. 23. Prov. xv. 3.

[2.] There is a performance of obedience under the eye of God as one that is peculiarly concerned in that obedience. God says to David, Psal. xxxii. 8. 'I will guide thee with mine eye.' The consideration of mine eye being upon thee, shall instruct thee, or teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. Mine eye is on thee as concerned in thy ways and obedience. This is to walk before God, to consider him as looking on us, as one deeply concerned in all our ways, walking, and obedience.

Now we consider the Lord as thus concerned, as one from whom we receive, 1st. Direction; 2dly. Protection; 3dly. Examination and trial.

1st. Direction: so before; 'I will guide thee with mine eye.' Consideration of the eye of God on us, sends us to him for counsel and direction in the whole course of our obedience. If a child walk in any way with his father looking on him, if he be at a loss at any time which way he ought to go, will he not inquire of him who knows, who looks on him in all his ways? Are we at any loss in our way, know we not what to do, or how to steer our course? Look to him whose eye is upon us, and we shall have direction; Prov. xxii. 12.

2dly. Protection in our walking in our obedience; Psal. xxxiv. 15. his eyes are so upon them, that his ears are open to them, to give them protection and deliverance: so fully, 2 Chron. xvi. 9. This is one end why the eyes of God are upon his and their ways, that he may shew himself strong in their behalf. I have seen it; he lays at the bottom of all their deliverance.

3dly. For trial and examination; Psal. xi. 4, 5. His eyes are upon us for to search and try if there be, as David speaks, any way of wickedness in us. This use he makes of the consideration of the omnipresence and omniscience of God; Psal. cxxxix. 7—19. Having set forth God's intimate knowledge of, and acquaintance with him, and all his ways, ver. 23, 24. he makes use of it, by appealing to him

about his integrity in his obedience. So saith Job to God, 'Hast thou eyes of flesh, or seest thou as man seeth?' chap. x. 4. that is, thou dost not. And what is this spoken in reference unto? Even his trying the paths and obedience of the sons of men; ver. 6. When our Saviour comes to try, examine, and search the obedience of his churches, he is said to have 'eyes of fire,' Rev. i. 14. and in pursuit of it he still tells his churches, 'I know thy works,' or, 'I have not found thee perfect, I have something against thee;' all arguing a trial and examination of their obedience.

This, I say, is to walk before God, or under his eye; to consider him looking on us peculiarly, as one concerned in our ways, walking, and obedience; that we may constantly take counsel of him, fly to him for protection, and consider that he weighs and tries all our ways and works, whether they are perfect according to the tenour of the covenant of grace.

Now there are two things that will certainly follow this consideration of our walking with God, being under his eye and control.

(1st.) Reverential thoughts of him. This God who is a consuming fire, is nigh to us, his eyes are always on us: 'Let us,' saith the apostle, 'have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably;' Heb. xii. 28, 29. If men order their deportment and carriage at least, unto a reverential appearance before their rulers or governors, who see only their outside; shall we not have a regard of him, who always hath his eye upon us, searches our hearts, and tries our reins, the most secret reserve of our souls? But of this afterward.

(2dly.) Self-abasement under a sense of our great vileness, and the imperfection of all our services. But both these belong properly to the next consideration, of what it is to walk humbly with God.

(5.) Our walking with God in our obedience argues complacency and delight therein; and that we are bound unto God in his ways with the cords of love. He that goes unwillingly, by compulsion with another, when every step is wearisome and burdensome to him, and his whole heart desires to be discharged of his company, can very improperly be said to walk with him, and no farther, than as the mere motion of the body may be so expressed. The Lord walketh

with us, and he rejoiceth over us, and in us, Zeph. iii. 17. as also he expresseth his delight in the particular service that we yield unto him; Cant. ii. 14. So also saith the Son and wisdom of God, Prov. viii. 31. his joy and his delight is in the obedience of the sons of men. Hence are those longing expressions of God after the obedience of his people; 'Oh, that there were such a heart in thee; that thou wouldest fear me! Turn you, turn you, when shall it once be!' What have you seen in me that you are gone away? And our Saviour, the husband of the church, carries this to the greatest height imaginable; Cant. iv. 9—16. He speaks as one transported by a delight not to be borne, which he receives from the love and obedience of his spouse; comparing it with things of the highest natural delight, and preferring them far before them.

Now surely if God hath this delight in us, in our walking before him; is it not expected that our delight should be in him in our obedience? It suits not my present business to go over the testimonies of Scripture, wherein either we are required to delight in the Lord; or have the example of the saints, who did so to the height proposed to us; or to insist on the nature of the delight I speak of. Job makes it a sure mark of a hypocrite, that he 'will not,' notwithstanding all his obedience, 'delight himself in the Almighty;' Job xxvii. 10. Only take notice that there is a twofold delight in this matter: [1.] A delight in the obedience itself, and the duties of it; [2.] A delight in God, in that obedience.

[1.] There may be a delight in the duties of obedience, upon some foreign respect, when there is no delight in God in them. A man may delight to go along with another in the way, on the account of some pleasantness in the way, or other occasions which he hath to draw him that way, though he hath no delight at all in the company of him with whom he walks. God tells us of a hypocritical people that sought him daily, and delighted to know his ways, and took delight in approaching to God; Isa. lviii. 2. And it is said of some, that Ezekiel's ministry was to them, as 'a cheerful song of one that had a pleasant voice;' wherefore they came and heard and attended on it, when their hearts went after their sins; Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. There may be something in the ad-

ministration of the ordinances of God, in the person administering, in the things administered, which may take the minds of hypocrites so that they may run after them, and attend to them with great delight and greediness. John 'was a burning and a shining light,' saith our Saviour to the wicked Jews, and 'they were willing for a season to rejoice' or delight 'in his light;' John v. 35. How many have we seen running after sermons, pressing with the multitude, finding sweetness and contentment in the word, who yet have nothing but novelty, or the ability of the preacher, or some outward consideration for the bottom of their delight.

[2.] There is a delight in God in our obedience: 'Delight thyself in the Lord,' saith the psalmist; Psal. xxxvii. 4. And a delight in obedience and duties, because it is his will, and his ways; when a person aims in every duty to meet with God, to have converse with him, to communicate his soul to him, and to receive refreshment from him; when on this account, our duties and all our ways of obedience are sweet and pleasant to us, then do we in them walk with God. Let not men think, who perform duties with a bondage-frame of spirit, to whom they are weariness and burdensome, but that they dare not omit them, who never examine their hearts whether they meet with God in their duties, or have any delight in so doing; let them not think, I say, whatever they do, that at all they walk with God.

I shall not insist on more particulars.

Use 1. Of direction: know that it is a great thing to walk with God as we ought. We heard before how many things were required to render it acceptable; now, some of the things that it consists in. Who almost hath prepared his heart to walk with God as he ought? Who considers whether his walking be such as it ought to be? Believe me, friends, a formal performance of duties, in a course, or a round, from one day, one week to another, both in private and public, may possibly come exceeding short of this walking with God. Men content themselves with a very slight and formal course: so they pray morning and evening; so they take part with some of the people of God, against open profane persons; so they keep themselves from such sins as would wound a natural conscience, all is well with them. Be not deceived, walking with God must have,

(1.) All the strength and vigour of the soul laid out in it. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' The soul and heart of a man is to be in the work; his design and contrivance about it; his contending in it. Form, and a course will not do it.

(2.) It is to have the perfection of the new covenant in universality, and sincerity attending it: it is not the doing of this or that thing, but the doing of all things by Christ commanded; not a loving of friends only, but of enemies; not a denial of the ways of ungodly men only, but a denial of self and the world; not a doing hurt to none only, but a doing good to all; not a hatred to evil men's ways only, but a love to their persons; not praying and hearing only, but giving alms, communicating, shewing mercy, exercising loving-kindness in the earth; not a mortification of pride and vanity only, especially, if as to others in any outward appearance, but of envy, wrath, discontent. In a word, 'It is perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord' that is required. If men professing religion, who are almost devoured by world, or flesh, or envy, or faction, or idleness, or uselessness in their generation, would but lay their hearts to the rules we have considered, they would find they had but little cause to hug themselves in their ways and walking.

I might here go over all the particulars that have been insisted on, and try our obedience by them. But,

Use 2. For others, I shall only ask over the heads of what have been delivered. Would you be thought to walk with God?

(1.) What evidence have you, that you are in covenant with him? That your covenant with hell and death is broken, and that you are taken into the bond of the covenant of grace? What account can you give to God, others, or your own souls of this your covenant state and condition? How many are at a loss as to this foundation of all, walking with God?

(2.) Is your obedience from faith? What evidence have you thereof? Go over all the causes, effects, and adjuncts of a justifying faith, and try whether you have this principle of all acceptable obedience? How hath it been wrought in you? What work of the Spirit have you had upon you? What have been your conviction, humiliation, and conver-

sion? When, how, by what means wrought? Are your hearts purified by it, and are you by it baptized into one spirit with the people of God; or are you still enemies to them?

(3.) Is your walking universal and perfect, according to the tenour of the covenant? Have you no sweet morsel under your tongue? No beloved lust that is indulged to, that you cannot as yet thoroughly part with? No allowed reserve for sin?

(4.) Do you delight in God in that obedience you yield; or are his ways a burden unto you, that you are scarce able to bear them? Weary of private prayer, of sabbaths, of all the worship of God? I leave these things with your consciences.

SERMON XXII.

WHAT it is to walk with God hath been declared.

II. What is added thereunto of duty, in this qualification, comes nextly to be considered.

Amongst the many eminent qualifications of the obedience of believers, we shall find in the issue this to stand in the forefront among the chiefest. The words in the original are, והצנע לכת: 'to humble thyself in walking,' or 'to walk with God.'

A man would think that it is such an honour and advancement, that a poor sinful creature should be taken into the company of the great God to walk with him; that he had need be exhorted to take upon him great thoughts of himself; that he may be prepared for it. Is it a light matter, says David, to be son-in-law to a king? Is it a light matter to walk with God? How had the heart of a man need to be lifted up, which hath such apprehensions of its condition? The matter is quite otherwise. He that would have his heart exalted up to God, must bring it down in itself. There is a pride in every man's heart by nature, lifting him up, and swelling him until he is too high and big for God to walk with.

Now, whereas there are two things in our walking with God, considerable: first, the inward power of it; and, secondly, the outward privilege of it, in an orderly admittance to the duties of it; the former alone is that which edifieth us in this duty, the latter puffeth up. These Jews here, and their successors the Pharisees, having the privilege of performing the outward duty of walking with God, were, as Capernaum, lifted up unto heaven, and trusting in themselves that they were righteous, they despised others: of all men, therefore, they were most abhorred of God. This is that which the Holy Ghost beats them from, resting in the privilege, to come up to the power. God tells us of the prince of Tyrus, that he set his 'heart as the heart of God,' Ezek. xxviii. 6. he would be on even terms with him; independent, the author of his own good, fearless. So in some measure is the heart of every man by nature; which, indeed, is not to be like God, but the devil.

To prevent this evil, I shall inquire, what it is that is here required of us under these two heads:

1. What it is in reference whereunto we are to humble ourselves in walking with God.

2. How we are to do it.

1. There are two things that we are to humble ourselves unto in our walking with God: (1.) The law of his grace; (2.) The law of his providence.

(1.) In all our walking with God, we are to humble ourselves in bowing to the law and rule of his grace, which is the way that he hath revealed, wherein he will walk with sinners. The apostle tells us of the Jews in sundry places, that they had a mind to walk with God; they had 'a zeal for God.' So he had himself in his pharisaism; Phil. iii. 6. He 'was zealous towards God,' Acts xxii. 3. and so were the Jews: Rom. x. 2. 'I bear them record, they have a zeal of God.' And they followed after righteousness, 'the law of righteousness;' Rom. ix. 31. They took pains 'to establish their righteousness;' chap. x. 3. What can be more required to walking with God, than a zeal for him; for his laws and ways, and a diligent endeavour to attain a righteousness before him? How few do we see attain thus much? What repute have they in the world that do so? But yet, saith the apostle, they did not attain to walk with God, nor the righteousness they sought after; chap. ix. 31. But what is the reason of it? Why, in their attempt to walk with God they did not bow themselves to the law of his grace: so chap. x. 3. 'They went about to establish their own righteousness, and did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God.' What righteousness is that? Why, 'the righteousness of faith,' according to the law of grace; Rom. i. 17. 'They sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law;' chap. ix. 32. And the ground of all this is discovered, ver. 33. Behold, here are two effects of Christ towards several persons: some stumble at him, and so are not able to walk on with God. Who are they? He tells you, ver. 32. Some are not ashamed: Who are they? They that believe, and so submit to the law of God's grace. It is evident then, that men may labour to walk with God, and yet stumble and fall, for want of this humbling themselves to the law of his grace.

Let us see then, how that may be done, and what is required thereunto. It is then required,

[1.] That the bottom of all a man's obedience lie in this, That in himself he is a lost undone creature, an object of wrath, and that whatever he have of God in any kind, he must have it in a way of mere mercy and grace. To this apprehension of himself, must proud man that would fain have something of his own, humble himself. God abhors every one that he sees coming towards him on any other account. Our Saviour Christ lets men know what they are, and what they must be, if they will come to God by him. 'I came,' saith he, 'to save that which was lost;' Matt. xviii. 11. 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;' Matt. ix. 13. Ver. 12. 'The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.' 'I came into the world,' says he, 'that they that are blind may see, and that they which see might be made blind;' John ix. 39. This is the sum; if you intend to have any thing to do with God by me, know yourselves to be lost sinners, blind, sick, dead, so that whatever you have, you must have it in a way of mere grace.

And how was this direction followed by Paul? Will you see the foundation of his obedience? You have it, 1 Tim. i. 13—15. I was thus and thus, I am the chiefest of sinners; 'but I obtained mercy.' It is mere mercy and grace, upon the account whereof I have any thing from God; which principle he improves to the height, Phil. iii. 7—9. All loss, all dung, Christ is all in all. This the proud Pharisees could not submit unto. It is the subject of much of their disputes with our Saviour. To be lost, blind, nothing, they could not endure to hear. Were they not children of Abraham? Did they not do so, and so? To tell them that they are lost and nothing, is but to speak out of envy. And on this rock do thousands split themselves in the days wherein we live. When they are overpowered by any conviction, to an apprehension of a necessity of walking with God, as more or less, at one time or other, by one means or other, most men are; they then set themselves on the performance of the duties they have neglected, and of the obedience which they think acceptable, abiding in that course whilst their conviction abides; but never humbling themselves to this part of the law of God's grace, to be vile, miserable, lost, cursed, hope-

less in themselves, never making thorough work of it. They lay the foundation of their obedience in a quagmire, whose bottom should have been digged into, and stumble at the stumbling-stone, in their first attempt to walk with God.

Now there are two evils attending the mere performance of this duty, which utterly disappoint all men's attempts for walking with God.

1st. That men without it will go forth, somewhat, at least, in their own strength, to walk with God. Why, say the Pharisees, can we do nothing? 'Are we blind also?' Acting in the power of self, will cleave to such a one, so as not to be separated; it will steal upon him in every duty he goes about. Now nothing is more universally opposite to the whole nature of gospel obedience, than this, that a man should perform the least of it in his own strength, without an actual influence of life and power from God in Christ: 'Without me,' says Christ, 'ye can do nothing;' John xv. 5. All that is done without strength from him, is nothing. God works in us 'to will and to do of his good pleasure;' Phil. ii. 13. Whatever a man doth, which God works not in him, which he receives not strength for from Christ, is all lost, all perishing. Now our fetching in of strength from Christ for every duty, is founded wholly in that subjection to the law of grace whereof we speak.

2dly. His obedience will build him up in that state wherein he is, or edify him towards hell and destruction; of which more afterward.

[2.] The second thing that we are to humble ourselves unto in the law of grace, is, a firm persuasion, exerting itself effectually in all our obedience, that there is not a righteousness to be obtained before God by the performance of any duties or obedience of ours whatever. That this lies in the law of the grace of God, the apostle disputes at large, Rom. iv. 13—15. 'If,' saith he, 'righteousness be by the law,' that is, by our obedience to God, according to the law, then faith and the promise serve to no purpose; there is an inconsistency between the law of grace, that is, of faith and the promise, and the obtaining of a righteousness before God by our obedience. So Gal. ii. 21. 'If righteousness were by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.' You would walk with God according to his mind, you would please him in Jesus

Christ: What do you do? You strive to perform the duties required at your hand, that on their account you may be accepted as righteous with God. I tell you, saith the apostle, if this be the state of things, 'Christ is dead in vain:' if this be a righteousness before God to be obtained by any thing you can do, the gospel is to no purpose.

And this also is the proud heart of man to humble himself to, if he will walk with God. He must obey, he must perform duties, he must be holy, he must abstain from every sin, and that all under a quick, living, energetical persuasion, that by these things, a righteousness before God is not to be obtained. This is to influence all your duties, to steer you in your whole course of obedience, and to accompany you in every act of it. How few are influenced with this persuasion in their walking with God? Do not most men proceed on other practical principles? Is not their great reserve for their appearance before God, hewed out of their own obedience? God knows they walk not with him.

[3.] In the midst of all our obedience, which is our own, we must believe and accept of a righteousness which is not our own, nor at all wrought or procured by us; of which we have no assurance that there is any such thing, but by the faith we have in the promise of God; and thereupon renouncing all that is in or of ourselves, we must merely and solely rest on that for righteousness and acceptance with God. This the apostle affirms his heart to be humbled unto, Phil. iii. 7—9. the place before mentioned: he reckons up all his own duties, is encompassed with them, sees them lying in great abundance on every hand, every one of them offering its assistance, perhaps painting its face, and crying that it is gain; but, saith the apostle, You are all loss and dung; I look for another righteousness than any you can give me.

Man sees and knows his own duty, his own righteousness and walking with God; he seeth what it costs and stands him in; he knows what pains he hath taken about it, what waiting, fasting, labouring, praying it hath cost him; how he hath cut himself short of his natural desires, and mortified his flesh in abstinence from sin. These are the things of a man, wrought in him, performed by him, and the spirit of a man knows them; and they will promise fair to the

heart of a man, that hath been sincere in them, for any end and purpose that he shall use them. But now for the righteousness of Christ, that is without him, he seeth it not, experiences it not, the spirit that is within him knows nothing of it, he hath no acquaintance with it, but merely as it is revealed and proposed in the promises, wherein yet it is nowhere said to him in particular, that it is his, and was provided for him, but only that it is so to and for believers. Now for a man to cast away that which he hath seen, for that which he hath not seen; to refuse that which promises to give him a fair entertainment and supportment in the presence of God, and which he is sure is his own, and cannot be taken from him, for that which he must venture on, upon the word of promise against ten thousand doubts, and fears, and temptations, that it belongs not to him; this requires humbling of the soul before God; and this the heart of a man is not easily brought unto: every man must make a venture for his future state and condition. The question only is, upon what he shall venture it? Our own obedience is at hand, and promises fairly to give assistance and help: for a man therefore wholly to cast it aside upon the naked promise of God to receive him in Christ, is a thing that the heart of man must be humbled unto. There is nothing in a man that will not dispute against this captivity of itself: innumerable proud reasonings and imaginations are set up against it; and when the mind and discursive notional part of the soul is overpowered with the truth, yet the practical principle of the will and the affections will exceedingly tumultuate against it. But this is the law of God's grace, which must be submitted unto, if we will walk with him. The most holy, wise, and zealous, who have yielded the most constant obedience unto God, whose good works, and godly conversation, have shone as lights in the world, must cast down all these crowns at the foot of Jesus, renounce all for him, and the righteousness that he hath wrought out for us. All must be sold for the pearl, all parted with for Christ. In the strictest course of exactest obedience in us, we are to look for a righteousness wholly without us.

[4.] We must humble ourselves to place our obedience on a new foot of account, and yet to pursue it with no less diligence than if it stood upon the old. Eph. ii. 8—10. 'By

grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.' If not of works, then what need of works any more? The first end appointed to our obedience was, that we might be saved. This end, it seems, is taken away: our works and duties are excluded from any efficiency in compassing of that end: for if it be of works, then 'grace is no more grace;' Gal. ii. 21. Then let us lay all works and obedience aside, and sin that grace may abound. That many did, that many do make this use of the grace of God, is most evident; so turning it into lasciviousness. But, saith the apostle, there is more to be said about works than so: their legal end is changed, and the old foundation they stood upon is taken away; but there is a new constitution making them necessary; a new obligation, requiring them no less exactly of us, than the former did, before it was disannulled: so ver. 10. 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.' God, saving us by grace, hath on that account, appointed that we should walk in obedience. There is this difference: before, I was to perform good works, because I was to be saved by them; now, because I am saved without them. God saving us in Christ by grace, hath appointed, that we shall perform that in a way of acknowledgment of our free salvation, which before we were to do to be saved. Though works left no room at all for grace, yet grace leaves room for works, though not the same they had before grace came. This then are we to humble ourselves to; to be as diligent in good works, and all duties of obedience, because we are saved without them, as we could be to be saved by them. He that walks with God, must humble his soul to place all his obedience on this foot of account. He hath saved us freely, only let our conversation be as beseemeth the gospel. How this principle is effectual in believers, as to the crucifying of all sin, Paul declares, Rom. vi. 14. 'Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.' The argument to carnal reason would lie quite contrary. If we are not under the law, that is, the condemning power of the law, then let sin have its dominion, power, sway. Did not the law forbid sin

under pain of damnation? 'Cursed is every one that continueth not,' &c. Did not the law command obedience with the promise of salvation? 'The man that doth the things of it, shall live therein.' If then the law be taken away from having power over us, to these ends and purposes, as to forbid sin with terror of damnation, and command obedience for righteousness and salvation; what need we perform the one, or avoid the other? Why, upon this account, saith the apostle, that we are under grace, which, with new ends, and on new motives and considerations, requires the one, and forbids the other.

Have we now, or do we constantly humble ourselves to this part of the law of God's grace; that we build up and establish our obedience on grace, and not on the law; on motives of love, not fear; from what God hath done for us in Christ, rather than from what we expect, because 'eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

[5.] We are to humble ourselves to this, that we address ourselves to the performance of the greatest duties, being fully persuaded that we have no strength for the least. This is that which lies so cross to flesh and blood, that our souls must be humbled to it, if ever we are brought to it, and yet without this there is no walking with God. There are great and mighty duties to be performed in our walking with God in a way of gospel obedience: there is cutting off right hands, plucking out right eyes, denying, yea, comparatively hating father, mother, and all relations, dying for Christ, laying down our lives for the brethren, crucifying the flesh, cutting short all earthly desires, keeping the body in subjection, bearing the cross, self-denial, and the like; which, when they come to be put in practice, will be found to be great and mighty duties. This is required in the law of grace, that we undertake, and go through with these all our days, with a full assurance and persuasion, that we have not strength of ourselves, or in ourselves, to perform the least of them. 'We are not sufficient of ourselves,' saith the apostle, 2 Cor. iii. 5. We cannot think a good thought: 'Without Christ we can do nothing;' John xv. 5. This to a carnal heart, looks like making of brick without straw. A hard saying it is, 'who can bear it?' May not men sit down

and say, 'Why doth he yet complain?' Is he not austere, reaping where he hath not sown? 'Are his ways equal?' Yea, most equal, righteous, and gracious. For this is the design of his thus dealing with us, that upon our addressing ourselves to any duty, we should look to him from whom are all our supplies, and thereby receive strength for what we have to do. How unable was Peter to walk upon the water? Yet, when Christ bids him come, he ventures in the midst of the sea, and with the command hath strength communicated to support him. God may call us to do or suffer what he pleases, so that his call have an efficacy with it to communicate strength for the performance of what he calls us to; Phil. i. 29.

This, I say, are we to humble ourselves unto; not only in the general, to reckon that the duties that are required of us, are not proportioned to the strength residing in us, but to the supply laid up for us in Christ; but also to lie under such an actual conclusion in every particular duty that we address ourselves to. This, in civil and natural things, were the greatest madness in the world; nor is it needful that you should add any farther discouragement to a man from attempting any thing, than to convince him that he hath no strength or ability to perform, or go through with it: once persuade him of that, and there is an end of all endeavours; for who will wear out himself about that which it is impossible he should attain? It is otherwise in spirituals; God may require any thing of us, that there is strength laid up in Christ for, enough to enable us to perform it: and we may by faith attempt any duty, though never so great, if there be grace to be obtained for it from Christ. Hence is that enumeration of the great things done by believers, through faith, utterly beyond their own strength and power, Heb. xi. 33, 34. 'Out of weakness were made strong.' When they entered upon the duty, they were weakness itself, but in the performance of it grew strong, by the supply that was administered. So we are said to come to Christ to 'find grace to help in time of need,' Heb. iv. 16. when we need it, as going about that which we have no might nor power for.

This is the way to walk with God, to be ready and willing to undergo any duty, though never so much above or beyond our strength, so we can see that in Christ there is a

supply. The truth is, he that shall consider what God requires of believers, would think them to have a stock of spiritual strength, like that of Samson's; since they are to fight with principalities and powers, contend against the world, and self, and what not: and he that shall look upon them, will quickly see their weakness and inability. Here lies the mystery of it; the duties required of them are proportioned to the grace laid up for them in Christ, not to what they are at any time themselves intrusted withal.

[6.] This also is another thing we are to humble ourselves unto; to be contented to have the sharpest afflictions accompanying and attending the strictest obedience. Men walking closely with God, may perhaps have some secret reserves for freedom from trouble in this life: hence they are apt to think strange of a fiery trial, 1 Pet. iv. 12. and therefore when it comes upon them, they are troubled, perplexed, and know not what it means, especially if they see others prospering, and at rest in the land, who know not God. Their estates are ruined, names blasted, bodies afflicted with violent diseases, children taken away, or turning profligate and rebellious, life in danger every hour, perhaps killed all the day long: hereupon they are ready to cry with Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 3. 'Lord remember;' or to contend about the business, as Job did, being troubled that he was disappointed in his expectation of dying in his nest. But this frame is utterly contrary to the law of the grace of God, which is, that the children that he receives are to be chastised: Heb. vii. 5. that they are to undergo whatever chastening he will call them to: for having made the captain of their salvation perfect through all manner of sufferings, he will make his conformable to him. This, I say, is part of the law of the grace of God, that in the choicest obedience we willingly undergo the greatest afflictions. The management of this principle between God and Job, were worth while to consider; for although he disputed long, yet God left him not until he brought him to own it, and to submit unto it with all his heart. This will farther appear in our second head, about submitting to the law of the providence of God. The truth is, to help our poor weak hearts in this business, to prevent all sinful repinings, disputes, and the

like, he hath laid in such provision of principles as may render the receiving of it sweet and easy to us. As,

1st. That he doth not correct us for his pleasure, but that he may make us partakers of his holiness: so that we are not in heaviness unless it be needful for us; which we may rest upon, when we neither see the cause, nor the particular of our visitation; then on this account we may rest on his sovereign will and wisdom.

2dly. That he will make all things work together for our good. This takes the poison out of every cup we are to drink, yea, all the bitterness of it. We have concernments that lie above all that here we can undergo or suffer; and if all work for our advantage and improvement, why should they not be welcome to us?

3dly. That conformity and likeness to Jesus Christ is hereby to be attained; and sundry other principles there are given out, to prevail with our hearts to submit and humble our souls to this part of the law of God's grace, which is a thing that the devil never thought Job would have done, and was therefore restless until it was put to the trial: but he was disappointed and conquered, and his condemnation aggravated.

And this is the first thing required of us, namely, that we humble ourselves to the law of the grace of God.

Use 1. Let us now take some brief account of ourselves, whether we do so or no. We perform duties, and so seem to walk with God: but,

(1.) Is the bottom of our obedience, a deep apprehension, and a full conviction of our own vileness and nothingness, of our being the chief of sinners, lost and undone, so that we always lie at the foot of sovereign grace and mercy? Is it so? Then when, how, by what means, was this apprehension brought upon us? I intend not a general notion that we are sinners; but a particular apprehension of our lost undone condition, with suitable affections thereunto. Do we cry to the Lord out of the depths? Or is the end of our obedience to keep ourselves out of such a condition? I am afraid many amongst us, could we, or themselves, by any means dive into the depths of their hearts, would be found to yield their obedience unto God, merely on the account of

keeping them out of the condition which they must be brought unto, before they can yield any acceptable obedience to him. If we think at all to walk with God, let us be clear in this, that such a sense and apprehension of ourselves lies at the bottom of it: 'Of sinners I am chief.'

(2.) Doth this always abide in our thoughts, and upon our spirits, that by all we have done, do, or can do, we cannot obtain righteousness to stand in the presence of God, so that in the secret reserves of our hearts, we place none of our righteousness on that account? Can we be content to suffer loss in all our obedience, as to an end of righteousness; and do we appear before God, simply on another head, as if there were no such thing as our own obedience in the world? Herein indeed lies the great mystery of gospel obedience, that we pursue it with all our strength and might, with all the vigour of our souls, and labour to abound in it like the angels in theirs, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord; and yet in point of the acceptation of our persons, to have no more regard unto it, than if we had yielded no more obedience than the thief on the cross.

(3.) Do we then humble ourselves to accept of the righteousness that God in Christ hath provided for us? It is a common working of the heart of them whom God is drawing to himself; they dare not close with the promise, they dare not accept of Christ and his righteousness, it would be presumption in them. And the answer is common, that indeed this is not fear and humility, but pride. Men know not how to humble themselves to a righteousness purely without them, on the testimony of God; the heart is not willing to it: we would willingly establish our own righteousness, and not submit to the righteousness of God. But how is it with our souls? Are we clear in this great point, or no? If we are not, we are at best shuffling with God; we walk not with him. He admits none into his company, but expressly on the terms of taking this righteousness that he hath provided: and his soul loathes them that would tender him any thing in the room thereof, as men engaged to set up their wisdom and righteousness against his. But I must conclude.

Use 2. If all these things are required to our walking with God, where shall they appear, what shall be their lot and

portion, who take no thought about these things? Some we see visibly to walk contrary to him, having no regard to him at all, nor considering their latter end. Others have some checks of conscience, that think to cure these distempers and eruptions of sin, with a loose cry of 'God be merciful to them.' Some go a little farther, to take care of the performance of duties, but they seek not God in a due manner; and he will make a breach upon them. The Lord awaken them all before it be too late.

SERMON XXIII.

What it is to humble ourselves to the law of God's grace, you have heard.

(2.) I come now to shew, what it is to humble ourselves to the law of his providence.

By the law of providence, I intend, God's sovereign disposal of all the concernments of men in this world, in the variety, order, and manner, which he pleaseth, according to the rule and infinite reason of his own goodness, wisdom, righteousness, and truth.

[1.] To evince what it is to humble ourselves to this law, some general observations must be given. And,

(1st.) There is, and ever was somewhat, very much, in God's providential administration of the things of this world, and the concernments of the sons of men therein, which the most improved reason of men cannot reach unto, and which is contrary to all that is in us, as merely men; of judgment, affections, or what else soever we are acted by.

'Thy judgments,' saith David unto God, 'are far above out of his sight,' Psal. x. 53. that is, of the man he is speaking of; he is not able to see the ground and reason, the order and beauty of them. And Psal. xxxvi. 6. 'Thy righteousness is like a great mountain, and thy judgments are a great deep;' that is, as the sea which none can look into the bottom of, nor know what is done in the caverns thereof. So that there is a height in the judgments of God not to be measured, and a depth not to be fathomed. Men cannot look into his ways. So also Psal. lxxvii. 19. 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.' Men must be content to stand at the shore, and admire at the works of God; but as to the beauty and excellency of them, they cannot search them out. To this purpose discourseth Zophar, in Job xi. 7—13. It is of the excellency and perfection of God in his works of providence that he is speaking; in the consideration of whose unsearchableness, he closes with that of ver. 12. Vain man would know the secrets of the counsels of God, the reason

of his ways; but, in his attempts after it, he is as an ass, as a wild ass, as the colt of a wild ass; than which, nothing could be spoken with more contempt, to abase the pride of a poor creature.

The ways of God are, we know, all perfect: he is our rock, and his work is perfect: nothing can be added to them, nor taken from them; yea, they are all comely and beautiful in their season: there is not any thing comes out from him, but it is from wonderful counsel; and all his ways will at length be found to praise him: but, as Job speaks, ix. 11. we perceive it not, we take no notice of it. 'For who hath known his mind, or been his counsellor?' Rom. xi. 33, 34.

Hence, not only the heathen were entangled in the consideration of the works of providence; some, upon it, turning atheists, most ascribing all things to blind, uncertain chance and contingency; and others, very few, labouring to set a lustre upon what they could not understand: but we have the people of God themselves disputing with him about the equality of his ways, bringing arguments against it, and contending against his wisdom in them. 'Ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal;' Ezek. xviii. 25. And again are they at it, xxxiii. 20. 'Yet ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal.' Yea, not only the common people, but the choicest of God's servants, under the old testament, were exceedingly exercised with this, that they could not oftentimes see the beauty and excellency, nor understand the reason or order of God's dispensations; which I might prove at large, in the instances of Job, David, Heman, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and others. Yea, there was nothing that God was more put to in dealing with his people of old, than to justify the righteousness and perfections of his providential dispensations, against their unjust, unbelieving complaints and manners.

This then being the condition of God's providential dispensations in general, that there is much in them, not only above us, and unsearchable to us, as to the reason and beauty of his ways, but also contrary to all that is in us of reason, judgment, or affections, there is surely need of humbling our souls to the law of this providence, if we intend to walk with him. Neither is there any other way to come to an agreement with him, or to quiet our hearts from repining.

2dly. There are four things in God's providential dis-

posing of the things and concernments of men in the world, that require this humbling of ourselves to him, as being no way able to grapple with him: (1st.) Visible confusion; (2dly.) Unspeakable variety; (3dly.) Sudden alterations; (4thly.) Deep distresses.

(1st.) Visible confusion, like that mentioned, Isa. viii. 22. He that takes a view of the general state of things in the world, will see nothing but trouble, darkness, and anguish; 'yea, darkness cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.' The oppression of tyrants, wasting of nations, destruction of men and beasts, fury and desolations, make up the things of the past and present ages. The greatest and choicest parts of the earth, in the meantime inhabited by them that know not God, that hate him, that fill and replenish the world with habitations of cruelty, sporting themselves in mischief, like the leviathan in the sea. In respect hereof God is said to make darkness his secret place and his pavilion, Psal. xviii. 11. and to dwell in the thick darkness, 2 Chron. vi. 1. and to wait for the issue of this dispensation; to humble themselves to the law of it, is the patience and wisdom of the saints. See Hab. ii. 1.

(2dly.) Unspeakable variety. Not to insist on particulars; the case of the saints throughout the world, is the only instance I shall mention, and that on a twofold account.

[1st.] Compared among themselves, in what unspeakable variety are they dealt withal? some under persecution always, some always at peace, some in dungeons and prisons, some at liberty in their own houses; the saints of one nation under great oppression for many ages, of another in quietness; in the same places some poor, in great distress, put hard to it for daily bread all their lives; others abounding in all things; some full of various afflictions, going softly and mourning all their days; others spared and scarce touched with the rod at all: and yet commonly the advantage of holiness, and close walking with God, lying on the distressed side. How doth God deal also with families in respect of grace, while he takes one whole family into covenant, and leaves out another whole family, whose heads and springs are no less holy? He comes into a house, and takes one, and leaves another; takes a despised outcast, and leaves a darling. Of

them also, some are wise, endowed with great gifts and abilities; others weak to contempt and reproach. Who can now with an eye of reason look upon them, and say, they are all the children of one father, and that he loves them all alike? Should you come into a great house, and see some children in scarlet, having all things needful, others hewing wood, and drawing water, you would conclude that they are not all children, but some children, some slaves; but when it shall be told you, that they are all one man's children, and that the hewers of wood that live on the bread and water of affliction, and go in tattered rags, are as dear to him as the other, and that he intends to leave them as good an inheritance as any of the rest; if you intend not to question the wisdom and goodness of the father of the family, you must resolve to submit to his authority with a quiet subjection of mind. So is it in the great family of God; nothing will quiet our souls, but humbling ourselves to the law of his providence.

[2dly.] Comparing them with others was the hard case of old; the pleading whereof, by Job, David, Jeremiah, and Habbakuk, is so known, that I shall not need farther to insist upon it.

I shall not farther manifest this from the variety which is in the dispensations of God towards the men of the world, which the wisest of men can reduce to no rule of righteousness, as things pass among us. Solomon acquaints us with it, Eccles. ix. 11. Things are disposed of according to no rule that we may fix our expectations on; which ruined the reason of that mirror of mankind, in a natural condition, Marcus Brutus, and made him cry out, *ὦ τλῆμον ἀρετή.*

(3dly.) Sudden alterations. As in the case of Job, God takes a man whom he hath blessed with choice of blessings, in the midst of a course of obedience and close walking with himself, when he expected to die in his nest, and to see good all his days; ruins him in a moment; blasts his name, that he who was esteemed a choice saint, shall not be able to deliver himself from the common esteem of a hypocrite; slays his children; takes away his rest, health, and every thing that is desirable to him. This amazes the soul, it knows not what God is doing, nor why he pleads with it in so much bitterness. A man that either is, or may fall into such a

condition, will find, that he will never be able to walk with God in it, without humbling himself to the law of his providence.

(4thly.) Great, deep, and abiding distresses have the same sffects with sudden alterations; of which more afterwards.

And these are in general some of the things in God's providential disposal of the things of men in this world, that are too hard and wonderful for flesh and blood, wherein his paths are in the deep, which are contrary to all rules of procedure that he hath given us to judge by, who are to judge of things but once, he being to call all things to a second account.

[2.] Having given these two observations, I return to what I first proposed, namely, the duty of humbling ourselves to the law of the providence of God, so far as it concerns us in particular.

I do not intend merely that men in general should be content with the dealings of God in the world, but that we should humble our hearts to him in what falls to be our share therein, though it come under any one or more of the heads of difficulty before mentioned. Our lots are various in this world: how they may be farther different before they go out of it we know not. Some are in one condition, some in another; that we envy not one another, nor any in the world, that we repine not at God, nor charge him foolishly, is that I aim at. A thing sufficiently necessary in these days, wherein good men are too little able to bear their own condition, if in any thing it differs from others.

The next thing then is to consider, how, and wherein we are to humble ourselves to the law of the providence of God. There are things on this account which our souls are to be humbled unto.

1. His sovereignty. May he not do what he will with his own? This is so argued out in Job, that I shall need to go no farther for the confirmation of it. See chap. xxxiii. 8—11. The words are the sum of what was, or was apprehended to be the complaint of Job; that in the midst of his innocency and course of obedience, God dealt hardly with him, and brought him into great distresses. What is the reply hereunto? ver. 12. 'Behold, in this thou art not just.' It is a

most unequal thing, for any man to make any such complaints. Whether Job did so or not, may be disputed; but for any one to do so is certainly most unjust. But on what ground is that asserted? See the words following: 'God is greater than man, why strivest thou with him?' It is to no purpose to contend with him, that is mightier than thou. And it is likewise unjust to do it with him, who is infinitely and incomparably so upon the account of his absolute dominion and sovereignty. For, saith he, 'He giveth no account of his matters.' He disposeth of all things as he will, and as he pleaseth. This is pursued to the utmost, chap. xxxiv. 18, 19. Men will not be forward openly to revile or repine against their governors. And what shall be said of God, who is infinitely exalted above them? Hence you have the conclusion of the whole matter, ver. 31—33.

This, I say, is the first thing that we are to humble ourselves unto. Let us lay our mouths in the dust, and ourselves on the ground, and say, It is the Lord, I will be silent because he hath done it; he is of one mind, and who can turn him? He doth whatever he pleaseth. Am not I in his hand, as clay in the hand of the potter? May he not make what kind of vessel he pleases? When I was not, he brought me out of nothing by his word. What I am, or have, is merely of his pleasure. Oh, let my heart and thoughts be full of deep subjection to his supreme dominion and uncontrollable sovereignty over me. This quieted Aaron in his great distress, and David in his, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. and Job in his. It is pleaded by the Lord, Jer. x. Rom. ix. 11. and innumerable other places. If we intend to walk with God, we must humble ourselves to this, and therein we shall find rest.

2. His wisdom. He is wise also, as he speaks in derision of men's pretending to be so. Indeed God is only wise; now he hath undertaken to make 'all things work together for good to them that love him;' Rom. viii. 28. That we shall not be in heaviness unless it be needful; 1 Pet. i. 6. In many dispensations of his providence we are at a loss; we cannot measure them by that rule. We see not how this state or condition can be good for the church in general, or us in particular. We suppose it would be more for his glory, and our advantage, if things were otherwise disposed. Innumerable are the reasonings of the hearts of

the sons of men, on this account; we know not the thoughts of our own souls herein, how vile they are. God will have us humble ourselves to his wisdom in all his dispensations; and to captivate our understandings thereunto. So Isa. xl. 27, 28. This is that which our hearts are to rest in, when ready to repine. There is no end of his understanding; he sees all things, in all their causes, effects, circumstances, in their utmost reach, tendency, and correspondency. We walk in a shade, and know nothing of what is before us; the day will come when we shall see one thing set against another, and infinite wisdom shining out in them all; that all things were done in number, weight, and measure; that nothing could have been otherwise than it is disposed of, without the abridgment of the glory of God, and the good of his church. Yea, I dare say, that there is no saint of God, that is distressed by any dispensation of providence, but that if he will seriously and impartially consider his own state and condition, the frame of his heart, his temptations, and ways, with so much of the aims and ends of the Lord as will assuredly be discovered to faith and prayer, but he will have some rays and beams of infinite wisdom shining in it, tempered with love, goodness, and faithfulness. But whether for the present we have this light or not, or are left unto darkness, this is the haven and rest of our tossed souls, the ark and bosom of our peace, to humble our souls to the infinite wisdom of God in all his procedure; and on that account quietly to commit all things to his management.

(3.) His righteousness. Though God will have us acquiesce in his sovereignty, when we can see nothing else; yet he will have us know, that all his ways are equal and righteous. The holy God will do no iniquity. That he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, is pleaded as much as any thing that he hath discovered of himself. 'Shall not the judge of all the world do right?' Is God unjust who inflicteth vengeance? God forbid. The righteousness of God, all which springeth from, and is reduced to the universal rectitude of his nature, in respect of the works that he doth, is manifold. It is that which is called 'Justitia regiminis,' his righteousness in rule or government, in the dispensation of rewards and punishments, that I am speaking of. Now, because we are not able to discern it in

many particulars of his proceedings, to help us in humbling our souls unto it, take these considerations.

(1.) That God judgeth not as man judgeth. Man judgeth according to the seeing of the eye, and the hearing of the ear; but God searcheth the heart. Little do we know what is in the heart of men; what transactions there are, or have been between God and them, which, if they were drawn forth as they shall be one day, the righteousness of God in his procedure, would shine as the sun. Rest on this, we know much less of the matter, on the account whereof God judgeth, than we do of the rule whereby he judges. Most things are to him otherwise than to us.

(2.) God is the great Judge of all the world, not of this, or that particular place; and so disposeth of all, as may tend to the good of the whole, and his glory in the universality of things. Our thoughts are bounded, much more our observation and knowledge, within a very narrow compass. That may seem deformed unto us, which when it lies under an eye that at once hath a prospect of the whole, is full of beauty and order. He that was able to see at once but some one small part of a goodly statue, might think it a deformed piece; when he that sees it altogether is assured of its due proportion and comeliness. All things in all places, of the age past and to come, lie at once naked before God, and he disposes of them so, as that in their contexture and answer one to another, they shall be full of order, which is properly righteousness.

(3.) God judges here, not by any final determinate sentence, but in a way of a preparation to a judgment to come. This unties all knots, and solves all difficulties whatever. This makes righteous and beautiful the deepest distresses of the godly, and the highest advancements of wicked men. And there let our souls rest themselves in quietness; Acts xvii.

(4.) His goodness, kindness, love, tenderness. Our souls must submit themselves to believe all these to be in all God's dispensations. I shall but name that one place wherein the apostle disputes for it, Heb. xii. 1—6. and add that wherewith Hosea closes his declaration of God's various dispensations and dealings with his people; chap. xiv. 9.

This now it is to humble our souls to the law of God's providence, in all his dispensations, to fall down before his sovereignty, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, love, and mercy. And without this frame of heart, there is no walking with God; unless we intend to come into his presence to quarrel with him, which will not be for our advantage.

This was Paul's frame; Phil. iv. 11. I have learned it saith he, it is not in me by nature; but I have now learned it by faith, I have humbled my soul to it; ἐν οἷς εἰμι, in the things, state, condition, good or bad, high or low, at liberty, or in prison, respected or despised, in health or sickness, living or dying, ἐν οἷς εἰμι, therein to bow myself to the law of the good providence of God, which is contentment. So was it also with David; Psal. cxxxi. 1. He did not exercise himself, or trouble himself about the ways and works of God, that were too high and too hard for him. How then did he behave himself? ver. 2. Something in his heart would have been inquiring after those things, but he quieted himself, and humbled his soul to the law of the providence of God; which hath that comfortable issue, mentioned, ver. iii. an exhortation not to dispute the ways of God, but to hope and trust in him, on the account mentioned before. This is also the advice that James gives to believers of all sorts; chap. i. 9, 10. Let every one rejoice in the dispensations of God, willingly bowing their hearts to it.

This is a popular argument of daily use. Should I insist on the reasons of it, its consequence, effects, and advantage; its necessity, if we desire that God should have any glory, or our own souls any peace, the perfect conquest that will be obtained by it over the evil of every condition, and stretch it in application to the saddest particular cases imaginable, for all which the Scripture abounds in directions; I should go too far out of my way.

This then, I say, is the second thing we are to humble ourselves unto.

2. My other inquiry remains, namely, how or by what means we are thus to humble ourselves to the law of grace and providence.

I shall but name one or two of the principal graces, in the exercise whereof, this may be performed.

(1.) Let faith have its work. There are among others

two things that faith will do, and is suited to do, that lie in a tendency hereunto.

[1.] It empties the soul of self. This is the proper work of faith, to discover the utter emptiness, insufficiency, nothingness that is in man unto any spiritual end or purpose whatever. So Eph. ii. 8, 9. Faith itself is of God, not of ourselves; and it teaches us to be all by grace, and not by any work of ours. If we will be any thing in ourselves, faith tells us then it is nothing to us; for it only fills them that are empty, and makes them all by grace, who are nothing by self. While faith is at work, it will fill the soul with such thoughts as these: I am nothing, a poor worm at God's disposal, lost if not found by Christ; have done, can do, nothing on the account whereof I should be accepted with God; surely God is to be in all things submitted to; and the way of his mere grace accepted. So Rom. iii. 27. This is the proper work of faith, to exclude and shut out boasting in ourselves; that is, to render us to ourselves such as have nothing at all to glory or rejoice in, in ourselves, that God may be all in all. Now this working of faith will keep the heart in a readiness to subject itself unto God in all things, both in the law of his grace and providence.

[2.] Faith will actually bring the soul to the foot of God, and give it up universally to his disposal. What did the faith of Abraham do when it obeyed the call of God? Isa. xli. 2. It brought him to the foot of God. God called him to be at his disposal universally, by faith to come to it, following him, he knew not for what, nor whither. Leave thy father's house and kindred: he disputes it not. Cast out Ishmael, whom thou lovest: he is gone. Sacrifice thine only Isaac: he goes about it. He was brought by faith to the foot of God, and stood at his disposal for all things. This is the proper nature of faith, to bring a man to that condition. So was it with David; 2 Sam. xv. 26, 27. This faith will do. Will God have me to suffer in my name, estate, family? It is the Lord, saith faith. Will he have me to be poor, despised in the world, of little or no use at all to him or his people? Who, saith faith, shall say to him, what doest thou? In any state and condition faith will find out arguments, to keep the soul always at God's disposal.

(2.) Constant abiding reverence of God will help the

soul in this universal resignation, and humbling of itself. Now this reverence of God, is an awful spiritual regard of the majesty of God, as he is pleased to concern himself in us, and in our walking before him, on the account of his holiness, greatness, omniscience, omnipresence, and the like. So Heb. xii. 28, 29. Psal. lxxxix. 7. Psal. iii. 9.

Now this reverence of God ariseth from three things, as is evident from the description of it.

[1.] The infinite excellency and majesty of God and his great name. This is the apostle's motive; Heb. xii. 29. and iv. 13. So Deut. xxviii. 58. The excellency of God in itself, is not only such as makes wicked men and hypocrites to tremble, whenever the thoughts of it seizes on them, Isa. xxxiii. 14. but also it hath filled the saints themselves with dread and terror; Heb. iii. 16. Nor is there any bearing the rays of his excellency, but as they are shadowed in Christ, by whom we have boldness to approach unto him.

[2.] The infinite, inconceivable distance wherein we stand from him. Thence is that direction of the wise man to a due regard of God at all times; Eccles. v. 2. He is in heaven, whence he manifests his glorious excellency in a poor worm creeping on the mire and clay of the earth. So did Abraham; Gen. xviii. 27. What an inconceivable distance is there between the glorious majesty of God, and a little dust which the wind blows away and it is gone?

[3.] That this inconceivably glorious God is pleased of his own grace to condescend to concern himself in us poor worms, and our services which he stands in no need of; Isa. lvii. 15. His eye is upon us, his heart is towards us. This makes David break into that admiration, 1 Chron. xvii. 16. and should do so to us.

Now what are the advantages of keeping alive a reverence of God in our hearts; how many ways it effectually conduces to enable us to humble our souls to the law of his grace and providence; what an issue it will put to all the reasonings of our hearts to the contrary, I cannot stay to declare. And the improvement of these two graces, faith and reverence, is all that I shall at present recommend unto you, for the end and purpose under consideration.

But I come, in the next place, to that part of this whole discourse which was at first principally intended.

SERMON XXIV.

We have at large considered the nature of this duty.

III. Let us now proceed to prove the proposition at first laid down, and shut up the whole, viz.

Humble walking with God is the great duty, and most valuable concernment of believers.

'What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?' This is sufficiently asserted in the words of the text itself, which being so emphatically proposed, stand not in need of any farther confirmation by testimony; but because this is a business the Scripture doth much abound in, I shall subjoin a single proof upon each part of the proposition: that it is both our great duty, and most valuable concernment.

For the former take that parallel place of Deut. x. 12, 13. That which is summarily expressed in my text by walking humbly with God, is here more at large described, with the same preface, 'What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?' It gives us both the root and fruit; the root in fear and love; the fruit in walking in God's ways, and keeping his commandments. The perfection of both is to fear and love the Lord with all the heart and all the soul, and to walk in all his ways. This is the great thing that God requires of professors.

A place of the same importance, as to the excellency of this concernment of believers, which is the second consideration of it, you have in the answer of the scribe commended by our Saviour, Mark xii. 33. as if he should say in these days, This is better than all your preaching, all your hearing, all your private meetings, all your conferences, all your fastings: whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices were then the instituted worship of God, appointed by him, and acceptable to him, as are the things which I now repeated. But all these outward things may be counterfeited, hypocrites may perform the outward work of them, as they then offered sacrifice; but walking humbly with God cannot: nor are they, in the best of men, of any value, but as they are parts and fruits of humble walking. If in and under the performance of them, there be, as there may be, a proud unmortified heart, not subdued to the law of the spirit of life, not humbled in

all things to walk with God, both they, and their performance, are abhorred of God. So that though these things ought to be done, yet our great concernment lies as to the main in humble walking: 'Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel.'

This is the import of the expression at the beginning of the verse; 'What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?' Thou mayest cast about in thy thoughts to other things, wherein either thyself may be more delighted, or, as thou supposest, may be more acceptable to God. Be not mistaken, this is the great thing that he requires of thee, to walk humbly with him.

The grounds of it are:

1. Every man is most concerned in that which is his great end; the bringing about of that, is of most importance to him; the great exercise of his thoughts are, whether he shall succeed as to this or not. The chief end of believers is the glory of God. This, I say, is so, or ought to be so. For this purpose they were made, redeemed to this purpose, and purchased to be a peculiar people. Now the Scripture everywhere teaches that the great means of our glorifying God, is by our humble walking with him, according as it was before described, John xv. 8. 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.' You may have many thoughts that God is glorified by works of miracles, and the like, amazing and dazzling the eyes of the world. Be it so; but in the most eminent manner, it is by your bearing fruit. You know the general rule that our Saviour gives his followers; Matt. v. 16. It is from our good works that men give glory to God. Which advice is again renewed by the Holy Ghost; 1 Pet. ii. 12.

Now there are sundry ways, whereby glory redounds to God by believers' humble walking with him: (1.) It gives him the glory of the doctrine of grace. (2.) It gives him the glory of the power of his grace. (3.) It gives him the glory of the law of his grace; that he is a king obeyed. (4.) It gives him the glory of his justice. (5.) The glory of his kingdom; first, in its order and beauty; secondly, in multiplying his subjects.

(1.) It gives God the glory of the doctrine of grace, or of the doctrine of the gospel, which is therefore called the lo-

rious gospel of God, because it so brings glory to him. Walking according to this rule, we adorn the doctrine of the gospel in all things: so the apostle tells us, Tit. ii. 11, 12. This is that which this grace teacheth us; the substance is, to walk humbly with God. And when men professing it, walk answerable to it, it is rendered glorious. When the world shall see, that these are the fruits which that doctrine produceth, they must needs magnify it. The pride, folly, and wickedness of professors, hath been the greatest obstacle that ever the gospel received in this world: nor will it by any endeavours whatever be advanced, until there be more conformity unto it, in them who make the greatest profession of it. Then is the word glorified, when it hath a free course and progress, 2 Thess. iii. 1. which it will not have without the humble walking of professors. What eminent gifts are poured out in the days wherein we live? What light is bestowed? What pains in preaching? How is the dispensation of the word multiplied? Yet how little ground is got by it? How few converted? The word hath a free course in preaching, but is not glorified in acceptable obedience. Is it not high time for professors and preachers to look at home, whether the obstacle lie not in ourselves? Do we not fortify the world against the doctrine we profess, by the fruits of it they see in ourselves, and our own ways? Do they not say of us, These are our new lights and professors, proud, selfish, worldly, unrighteous, negligent of the ordinances themselves profess to magnify, useless in their places and generations, falling into the very same path which they condemn in others? Perhaps they may deal falsely and maliciously in these things. But is it not high time for us to examine ourselves, lest abounding in preaching and talking, we have forgot to walk humbly with God, and so not glorifying the gospel, have hindered the free course of its work and efficacy?

(2.) Humble walking with God, gives him the glory of the power of his grace; his converting, sanctifying grace. When the world shall see a poor, proud, selfish, rebellious, froward, perhaps dissolute and debauched creature, made gentle, meek, humble, self-denying, sober, useful, they cannot but inquire after the secret and hidden virtue and power which principled such a change. This is given as the glory

of the grace that was to be administered under the gospel, that it should change the nature of the vilest men; that it should take away cruelty from the wolf, and violence from the leopard, rage from the lion, and poison from the asp, making them gentle and useful as the kid and the calf, the cow and the ox; Isa. xi. 6—9. It is not in our nature to humble ourselves to walk with God; we have an opposition to it, and all parts of it; no angels or men can persuade us to it; our carnal mind is enmity to him, not subject to his law, nor can be. To have our souls humbled, brought to the foot of God, made always ready, willing, obedient, turned in their whole course, changed in all their ways and principles, this glorifies the grace of God which is dispensed in Christ, by which alone it is, that the work is wrought. When men make profession to have received converting and renewing grace from God, and so separate themselves from the men of the world on that account, yet live as they do, or worse, so that their ways and walking are contemptible to all, it is the greatest reproach imaginable to that work of grace which they make profession of.

(3.) This gives God the glory of his law, whereby he requires this obedience at our hands. The obedience of them that are subject to it, sets forth the glory of the wisdom, goodness, and power of the lawgiver, in that law. But this may be referred to the first head.

(4.) It gives him the glory of his justice, even in this world. There are two sorts of people in the world; the children of God, and others; temptations lie on both, in reference to each other. The children of God are often disturbed by the outward prosperity of the wicked: the men of the world, at the public claim which they make in the privilege of God's love and protection: why they rather than others, than we? For the first, we know upon what principle they are to satisfy themselves. For the latter, this gives God the glory of his justice, when those whom he owns in this world, who expect a crown of reward from him, do walk humbly with him. So the apostle, 2 Thess. i. 4, 5. Your patience and faith in tribulation, saith he to the saints, is a manifest token of the righteous judgments of God, that ye may be counted worthy of his kingdom. Their patient and humble walking will be an evidence to convince

even the world of the righteous justice of God, in rewarding of them, and rejecting of itself. Though eternal life be the gift of God, and chiefly respects the praise of his glorious grace in Jesus Christ, yet God intending to bestow it on us in a way of reward, he will therein visibly glorify his justice also. Now this gives a foretaste of it unto men, when they shall see those whom he will reward, to walk humbly with him; wherein it may appear that his ways are equal, and his judgment righteous, or, as the apostle speaks, 'according to truth.'

(5.) It gives him the glory of his kingdom, in being an effectual means for the increase of the number of his subjects, and so the propagation of it in the world.

Now if on all these, and on sundry other considerations, God be glorified in a humble walking with him, beyond any thing else in this world; this humble walking must certainly be the great and incomparable concernment of all them, whose chief end is the advancement of the glory of God.

2. It is our great concernment, because God is greatly delighted in it, it is well pleasing to him: the humble walking of professors is the great delight of the soul of God; all that he hath in this world to delight in. If this be our aim, if this be our great interest, that we may please God, that he may delight in us, and rejoice over us, this is the way whereby it is to be done; Isa. lvii. 15. As I dwell, saith God, in the high and holy place, delight to abide in the heavens, where I manifest my glory; so I dwell with the humble and contrite spirit with delight and joy. Men in an opposition to this frame, be they what they will else in outward profession, are proud men. Nothing takes away pride in the sight of God, but this humble walking with him. Now 'the proud he knoweth afar off,' Psal. cxxxviii. 6. he takes notice of them with scorn and indignation, they are to him an abominable thing. It is three times solemnly asserted in the Scriptures, that God resisteth the proud, or scorneth the scorner, and giveth grace to the humble and lowly; Prov. iii. 34. Jam. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5. God scorns, abominates, resists, and sets himself against such men; but he gives grace or favour to the lowly, to the humble. This is admirably set out, Isa. lxvi. 1—3. He deals there

with a professing people, men that in all they did, said, 'Let the Lord be glorified;' ver. 5. These men aiming at acceptance with him, and to have him delight in them, pretended principally two things.

(1.) The glory of the temple, that high and holy house that was built to his own name. Says God, as to this, do you think that I have any need of it, or any delight in it, as it is such a goodly and glorious fabric in your eyes? The heaven is my throne, saith he, and the earth my footstool, my hands have made all these things; what need have I of the house you have built, or what delight in it?

(2.) They pleaded his worship and service, the duties they performed therein, their sacrifices and oblations, praying, hearing: alas! saith God, all these things I abhor. And so he compares them to the things which his soul did most hate, and which he had most severely forbid, ver. 3. But if God will take delight in none of these things; if neither temple, nor ordinances, worship, nor duty of religion will prevail, what is it that he delights in? Saith the Lord, 'To this man will I look,' I will rejoice over him, and rest in my love. Let now the proud Pharisee come and boast his righteousness, his duties, his worship, and performances; the eye of God is on the poor creature behind the door, that is crying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner;' that is, giving himself up to sovereign mercy, and following after him upon that account. We have got a holiness that puffeth up; that in some hath little other fruit, but, 'Stand from me, I am holier than thou.' God delights not in it. It is a hard thing to excel in humble walking; it is easier obtained by other ways, but God delights not in them.

3. It is our great concernment, because this makes us alone eminently conformable to Jesus Christ. When the church is raised up to an expectation of his coming, she is bid to look for him as one 'meek and lowly;' Zech. ix. 9. And when he calls men to a conformity to his example, this he proposes to them; 'Learn of me,' saith he, Matt. xi. 29. What shall we learn of him? What doth he propose to our imitation? That we should work miracles, walk on the sea, open blind eyes, raise the dead, to speak as never man spake? No, saith he, this is not your concernment; but 'learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you

shall find rest for your souls.' 'Let this mind be in you,' saith the apostle, 'that was in Jesus Christ;' Phil. ii. 5. What mind was this? He describes it in the next verse, in his humbling, emptying himself, making himself poor, nothing, that he might do the will of God, coming to his foot, waiting for his command, doing his will cheerfully and readily. Let, saith he, this mind be in you, to be like Christ in this. I might go over all the contents of humble walking with God, and shew the excellency of Jesus Christ in them, and how our conformity to Christ doth principally consist therein. But I must hasten.

4. I might farther evince it, by an induction of the promises that are made unto humble walking with God. But this would be a long work to insist on the most considerable particulars; so that I shall wholly omit it.

5. It will appear so by comparing it with any thing else, wherein men may suppose their interest and concernment to lie.

(1.) Some men (I speak of professors), live as though their great concernments were in heaping up to themselves the things of this world. Their hearts are devoured with cares about them, and their thoughts taken up with them. This I shall not so much as compare with humble walking with God, nor make it my business from the vanity, uncertainty, uselessness as to any eternal end, unsatisfactoriness, attendings of fear, care, and love, to manifest their great incompetency once to come into consideration in this inquiry, as to what is the great concernment of a professor.

(2.) There are others whose designs lie after greatness, high places, esteem in the world, to be somebody in their days, outrunning the providence and call of God to that end, and who make this their business and interest, without farther consideration. But we may say the same of these, as of the former: their way is folly, though they that follow them should praise their sayings.

(3.) There are those, whose aim is to be learned indeed, and so accounted. This they make their work; on this they set up their rest; this takes up their time and strength; if this succeed, all is well, they have their heart's desire. The beauty of this also is fully sullied, and the vanity of it hath been discovered by many, and the shame of its naked-

ness made to appear. Is this thy great concernment? Dost thou waste thy time and spirit about it? Is this the bosom of thy rest? Hast thou here laid up thy glory? And dost thou aim at this as thy end? Poor creature, thou snuffest up the empty wind! All this while God may abhor thee; and thy learning will never swell to such a greatness, as that the door of hell will not be wide enough to receive thee. The vanity, vexation, dreadfulness, emptiness of this concernment, may be easily discovered.

Nay, put all these together; suppose thou hast high places, learning, and an answerable repute and credit to them all, that thou hadst on these heads all that thy heart can desire, and more than ever man had before thee; would it all give rest to thy soul? Canst thou not look through it all? Why then dost thou spend thy strength for a thing of nought? Why is the flower of thy spirit laid out about these things, that indeed are not, or as a thing of nought? But,

(4.) Some men's great concernment seems to lie in a profession of religion. So they may attain to that, and therewithal a name to live, it doth suffice. Whether this humble walking with God, in any of the causes or effects of it, be found on them, they are not solicitous. That men may not rest here, give me leave to offer two or three considerations.

[1.] All that they do, may be counterfeited, and so wherein is its excellency? It may be done by him who hath not the least of God or Christ in him. Hypocrites may hear much, pray often, speak of God, and the things of God; perform all duties of religion, excel in gifts and parts, be forward in profession to a great repute, and yet be hypocrites still.

[2.] All this hath been done by them who have perished. Many who are now in hell, have done all these things, and went down to the pit with the burden of their profession and duties at their back: I could reckon up instances. And let me but try this foundation, which safely I may, namely, that whatever excellencies have been found in hypocrites and perishing souls, may all meet in one, and yet he be an hypocrite still, and I shall merit easily the best of mere profession. Take the zeal of Jehu, the hearing of Herod, the praying of the Pharisee, the fasting of the Jews, Isa. lviii. the joy of the stony ground, and you may dress up a perishing

soul, to a proportion of beauty in profession, beyond what the most of us attain unto.

[3.] It is useless in the world. I shall freely say, take away this humble walking, and all profession is a thing of nought; it doth no good at all in the world. Is it for the advantage of mankind, that a man should have credit and repute in religion, and cannot give an instance scarce, that any man, high or low, rich or poor, hath been the better for him in the world? That they who should do good to all, do good to none at all? Is this being fruitful in the gospel? Is this studying the good works that are profitable to all? Is this doing good to mankind in the places wherein we are?

[4.] This is the readiest way for a man to deceive himself to eternity. He that would go down to the pit in peace, let him keep up duties in his family and closet, let him hear as often as he can have an opportunity, let him speak often of good things, let him leave the company of profane and ignorant men, until he have obtained a great repute for religion; let him preach, and labour to make others better than he is himself, and in the meantime neglect to humble his heart to walk with God in a manifest holiness and usefulness, and he will not fail of his end.

Let me not be mistaken; God forbid I should countenance profane men in their contempt of the ways of God, and the reproaches of hypocrisy that they are ready to cast upon the best of the saints of God: I say, God forbid. Nor let me be interpreted in the least to plead for men who satisfy themselves in a righteousness without these things, whom I look upon as men ignorant wholly of the mystery of God and the Father, and of Christ, and evidently uninterested in the covenant of grace. No, this is all I aim at; I would not have professors flatter themselves in a vain, empty profession, when the fruits they bear of envy, hatred, pride, folly, proclaim that their hearts are not humbled to walk with God. Will then these, or any of these things stand in competition with that which we propose for the great concernment of souls? Doubtless, in comparison of it, they are all a thing of nought.

Use 1. Is humble walking with God our great concernment? Let us make it our business and our work to bring

our hearts unto it all our days. What do we running out of the way all the day long, spending our strength for that which is not bread? My business is not, whether I be rich or poor, wise or unwise, learned or ignorant, whether I shall live or die, whether there shall be peace or war with the nations, whether my house shall flourish or wither, whether my gifts be many or few, great or small, whether I have good repute or bad repute in the world; but only whether I walk humbly with God or not? As it is with me in this respect, so is my present condition, so will be my future acceptation. I have tired myself about many things, this one is necessary: What doth the Lord my God require of me, but this? What doth Christ call for, but this? What doth the whole sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost tend to, but that I may walk humbly with God?

Give me leave to name a motive or two unto it.

(1.) In humble walking with God, we shall find peace in every condition. 'Learn of me, I am meek and lowly, and you shall find rest to your souls.' Let war come on the nation, I shall have peace. Let a consumption come on my estate, I shall have peace. Let nearest relations be taken away, I shall have peace. The soul that sets up its rest, and makes it its great concernment to walk humbly with God, is brought to his foot, bent to his will, is ready for his disposal; and whatever God does in the world with himself, his, or others, he hath peace and quietness in it; his own will is gone, the will of God is his choice; his great concernment lies not in any thing that can perish, that can be lost.

(2.) We shall also find comfort. Mephibosheth cried, Let all go, seeing the king is come in peace, which was all that I desired. When a man shall see in the worst state and condition, that his great concernment is safe; that though all is lost, God, who is all, is not lost; that this can never be taken from him, it fills his heart with delight. Is he in prosperity? he fears not the loss of that which he most values. Is he in adversity? yet he can walk with God still, which is his all. He can therefore glory in tribulations, rejoice in afflictions, his treasure, his concernment is secure.

(3.) This alone will make us useful in our generation, and fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ. On this depends all the glory we bring to God, and all the good we do to men.

Let us then make this our business; aim at it; and in the strength of Christ, we shall have peace in it.

Use 2. To humble us all, that we have spent so much of our time and days in and about things wherein we are indeed so little concerned, let us a little bring our ways and affairs to the balance of the sanctuary. One hath risen early, gone to bed late, and worn out himself to increase knowledge and learning. What is it when we have done? An engine in the hand of Satan to puff us up with pride and folly; a diversion from the knowledge of Christ, full of vexation of spirit. How many other things have entangled us? What weight have we laid upon them? How have we put a value upon that profession, which hath been a shame rather than an honour to the gospel? The Lord forgive us our folly, in spending ourselves in and about things wherein we are so little concerned; and help us, that our mistake be not at last found out to be fatal. Could we seriously take a view of our ways and time, and see how much of it we have spent in and about things that indeed will, in the issue, do us no good; it would certainly fill our souls with a great deal of shame and confusion.

Use 3. As to them who seem not at all to be concerned in this business; who never made it their design in their lives to walk with God in the way that hath been spoken to: let me tell such

(1.) It is more than probable, that they may be apt to take advantage at what hath been spoken against empty professors and profession, to triumph in their thoughts against them all, and say, Such indeed they are, and no better. If so, it is possible that this discourse, through the just judgment of God, may tend to their farther hardening in their sin, pride, and folly. What is the Lord's intendment towards you, I know not. It is my duty to warn you of it. Some that are professors may fail of the mark of our high calling; but you that are none, can never attain it: but take heed that this be not the issue of this dispensation of the word towards you. I had rather never speak more in this place, than speak any one word with an intention to give you an ad-

vantage against professors; if you take it, it will be your ruin.

(2.) Consider this, if the righteous be scarcely saved, where will you and such as you, bitter scoffers, neglecters of ordinances, haters of the power of godliness, and the purity of religion, appear? You whose pride and folly, or whose formality, lukewarmness, and superstition, whose company and society, whose ways and daily walking, proclaim you to be wholly strangers to this concernment of believers? I say, what will be your lot and portion?

(3.) Consider how useless you are in this world. You bring no glory to God, but dishonour; and whereas by any outward acts, you may suppose you do good sometimes to men; know that you do more hurt every day, than you do good all your lives. How many are by you ensnared into hell! How many hardened! How many destroyed by living in formality or profaneness!

SERMON XXV.

PROVIDENTIAL CHANGES, AN ARGUMENT FOR UNIVERSAL HOLINESS.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?—2 PET. iii. 11.

THAT this second epistle was written unto the same persons to whom the former was directed, the apostle himself informs us, chap. iii. 1. Who they were to whom the first was directed, he declares fully, 1 Epist. i. 1, 2. 'Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontius, Galatia,' &c.

'Strangers' are taken two ways: First, In a large, general, and spiritual sense. So all believers are said to be strangers and pilgrims in this world, because they are not of the world, but they look for another country, another city, another house, whose framer and builder is God. Secondly, In a proper, natural sense; for those who abide or dwell in a land that is not their own, wherein they have not right of inheritance with the natives and citizens of it. In this sense, the patriarchs were strangers in the land of Canaan, before it came to be the possession of their posterity: and the children of Israel were strangers four hundred years in the land of Egypt.

Now though the persons to whom the apostle wrote, were strangers in the first sense, pilgrims whose conversation and country was in heaven, yet they were no more so than all other believers in the world; so that there was no just cause of saluting them peculiarly under that style and title, were there not some other special reason of that appellation. They were therefore also strangers in the latter sense, persons who had no inheritance in the place of their abode, that were not the free and privileged natives of the country where they dwelt and inhabited; that is, they were Jews scattered abroad in those parts of the world.

The people of Israel in those days were under various distributions and appellations. First, They were the natives of Jerusalem, and the parts adjacent; and these were in the gospel peculiarly called Jews. You have it often mentioned, that in our Saviour's discourse with them, the Jews answered so and so; that is, the natives of Jerusalem, and places adjoining. Secondly, Those who inhabited the sea-coasts of the country, whom the others much despised, and called them, from the place of their habitation, as if they had been men of another nation, 'Galileans.' Thirdly, Those who lived in several dispersions up and down the world among other nations. Of these there were two chief sorts: (1.) Those who lived in some parts of Europe, in Asia the less, also at Alexandria, and other Greek colonies. These are in the Scripture sometimes called Greeks, Acts xvii. and elsewhere, commonly termed Hellenists, because they used the Greek language, and the Greek Bible then in use. (2.) Those who lived in the greater Asia, in and about Babylon; as also in the countries here enumerated by the apostle: the Jews converted to the faith, that lived scatteredly up and down in those parts of Asia.

Peter being in a special manner designed by the Holy Ghost the apostle of the circumcision, and being now at Babylon in the discharge of his apostolical office and duty, 1 Epist. v. 13. and being now nigh unto death, which he also knew, 2 Epist. i. 14. and not perhaps having time to pass through, and personally visit these scattered believers; he wrote unto them these two epistles, partly about the main and important truths of the gospel, and partly about their own particular and immediate concernment, as to the temptations and afflictions wherewith they were exercised.

It is evident, from sundry places in the New Testament, what extreme oppositions the believing Jews met withal all the world over from their own countrymen, with and among whom they lived. They in the meantime, no doubt, warned them of the wrath of Christ against them, for their cursed unbelief and persecutions; particularly letting them know, that Christ would come in vengeance ere long, according as he had threatened, to the ruin of his enemies. And because the persecuting Jews all the world over upbraided the believers with the temple and the holy city Jerusalem, their

worship and service instituted of God, which they had defiled; they were given to know, that even all these things also should be destroyed, for their rejection of the Son of God. After some continuance of time, the threatening denounced being not yet accomplished, as is the manner of profane persons and hardened sinners, Eccles. viii. 11. they began to mock and scoff, as if they were all but the vain pretences, or loose, causeless fears of the Christians. That this was the state with them, or shortly would be, the apostle declares in this chapter, ver. 3, 4. Because things continued in the old state without alteration, and judgment was not speedily executed, they scoffed at all the threats about the coming of the Lord, that had been denounced against them.

Hereupon the apostle undertakes these three things:

First, He convinces the scoffers of folly by an instance of the like presumption in persons not unlike them, and the dealings of God in a case of the same nature.

Secondly, He instructs believers in the truth of what they had before been told concerning the coming of Christ, and the destruction of ungodly men.

Thirdly, He informs them in the due use and improvement that ought practically to be made of the certainty of this threatening of the coming of Christ.

For the first he minds them, as I said, of the old world, ver. 5, 6. Before the destruction of that world, God sent 'Noah, a preacher of righteousness,' who both in word and deed effectually admonished men of the judgment of God, that was ready to come upon them; but they scoffed at his preaching and practice, in building the ark, and persisted in their security. Now, saith he, 'this they are willingly ignorant of;' it is through the obstinacy and stubbornness of their will, they do not consider it; for otherwise they had the Scripture, and knew the story. There is no ignorance like that, where men's obstinacy and hardness in sin keeps them from a due improvement of what they ought to have improved to its proper purpose. They are to this day willingly ignorant of the flood who live securely in sin, under the denunciation of the judgments of God against sin.

I shall only observe by the way, not to look into the difficulties of these verses, that I be not too long detained from my principal intendment, that the apostle makes a distribu-

tion of the world into heaven and earth, and saith, they 'were destroyed with water and perished.' We know that neither the fabric or substance of the one or other was destroyed, but only men that lived on the earth; and the apostle tells us, ver. 7. of the 'heaven and earth that were then,' and 'were destroyed by water,' distinct from 'the heavens and the earth that were now,' and 'were to be consumed by fire:' and yet as to the visible fabric of heaven and earth, they were the same both before the flood and in the apostle's time, and continue so to this day; when yet it is certain, that the heavens and earth whereof he speaks, were to be destroyed and consumed by fire in that generation. We must then, for the clearing our foundation, a little consider what the apostle intends by the heavens and the earth in these two places.

1. It is certain, that what the apostle intends by the world, with its heavens and earth, ver. 5, 6. which was destroyed; the same or somewhat of that kind he intends by the heavens and the earth that were to be consumed and destroyed by fire, ver. 7. otherwise there would be no coherence in the apostle's discourse, nor any kind of argument, but a mere fallacy of words.

2. It is certain, that by the flood, the world, or the fabric of heaven and earth, was not destroyed, but only the inhabitants of the world; and therefore the destruction intimated to succeed by fire, is not of the substance of the heavens and the earth, which shall not be consumed until the last day, but of persons or men living in the world.

3. Then we must consider, in what sense men living in the world are said to be the world, and the heavens and earth of it. I shall only insist on one instance to this purpose, among many that may be produced, Isa. li. 15, 16. The time when the work here mentioned of planting the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth, was performed by God, was when he 'divided the sea,' ver. 15. and gave the law, ver. 16. and said to Zion, 'Thou art my people;' that is, when he took the children of Israel out of Egypt, and formed them in the wilderness into a church and state; then he planted the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth; made the new world; that is, brought forth order, and government, and beauty, from the confusion wherein

before they were. This is the planting of the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth in the world. And hence it is, that when mention is made of the destruction of a state and government, it is in that language that seems to set forth the end of the world. So Isa. xxxiv. 4. which is yet but the destruction of the state of Edom. The like also is affirmed of the Roman empire, Rev. vi. 14. which the Jews constantly affirm to be intended by Edom in the prophets. And in our Saviour Christ's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, Matt. xxiv. he sets it out by expressions of the same importance. It is evident, then, that in the prophetical idiom and manner of speech, by heavens and earth, the civil and religious state and combination of men in the world, and the men of them are often understood. So were the heavens and earth that world which then was destroyed by the flood.

4. On this foundation, I affirm, that the heavens and earth here intended in this prophecy of Peter, the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men, mentioned in the destruction of that heaven and earth, do all of them relate, not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state; for which I shall offer these two reasons, of many that might be insisted on from the text.

(1.) Because whatever is here mentioned, was to have its peculiar influence on the men of that generation. He speaks of that wherein both the profane scoffers, and those scoffed at, were concerned, and that as Jews; some of them believing, others opposing the faith. Now there was no particular concernment of that generation, nor in that sin, nor in that scoffing, as to the day of judgment in general; but there was a peculiar relief for the one, and a peculiar dread for the other at hand in the destruction of the Jewish nation; and besides an ample testimony both to the one and the other of the power and dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was the thing in question between them.

(2.) Peter tells them, that after the destruction and judgment that he speaks of, ver. 13. 'We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,' &c. they had this expectation. But what is that promise? Where may

we find it? Why we have it in the very words and letter, Isa. lxv. 17. Now when shall this be that God will create these 'new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness?' Saith Peter, it shall be after the coming of the Lord, after that judgment and destruction of ungodly men, who obey not the gospel, that I foretell. But now it is evident from this place of Isaiah, with chap. lxvi. 21, 22. that this is a prophecy of gospel times only; and that the planting of these new heavens, is nothing but the creation of gospel ordinances to endure for ever. The same thing is so expressed, Heb. xii. 26—28.

This being then the design of the place, I shall not insist longer on the context, but briefly open the words proposed, and fix upon the truth contained in them.

First, There is the foundation of the apostle's inference and exhortation, *τούτων οὖν πάντων λυομένων*: seeing that I have evinced that all these things, however precious they seem, or what value soever any put upon them, shall be dissolved, that is, destroyed; and that in that dreadful and fearful manner before mentioned, in a way of judgment, wrath, and vengeance, by fire and sword; let others mock at the threats of Christ's coming, he will come, he will not tarry: and then the heavens and earth that God himself planted, the sun, moon, and stars of the Judaical polity and church, the whole old world of worship and worshippers that stand out in their obstinacy against the Lord Christ, shall be sensibly dissolved and destroyed; this we know shall be the end of these things, and that shortly.

There is no outward constitution nor frame of things in governments or nations, but it is subject to a dissolution, and may receive it, and that in a way of judgment. If any might plead exemption, that on many accounts of which the apostle was discoursing, in prophetical terms (for it was not yet time to speak it openly to all), might interpose for its share. But that also, though of God's creation, yet standing in the way of, and in opposition to, the interest of Christ, that also shall be dissolved: and certainly there is no greater folly in the world, than for a mere human creation, a mere product of the sayings and the wisdom of men, to pretend for eternity, or any duration beyond the coincidence

of its usefulness to the great ends that Christ hath to accomplish in the world. But this is not my business.

Secondly, There is the apostle's inference from, or exhortation on this supposition, expressed emphatically by way of interrogation: 'What manner?'

Now herein two things are included.

1. The evidence of the inference. It follows necessarily, unavoidably; every one must needs make this conclusion: so that he leaves it to themselves to determine whose concernment it is. So the apostle Paul in another case, Heb. x. 29. leaves it to themselves to determine, as a case clear, plain, unquestionable. So here: and this is a most effectual way of insinuating an inference and conclusion, when the parties themselves who are pressed with it, are made judges of its necessary consequence. Judge ye whether holiness becomes not all them who are like to be concerned in such providential alterations.

2. The extent and perfection of the duty in its universality and compass, is in this manner of expression strongly insinuated: 'What manner of persons?' That is, such as indeed it is not easy to express, what attainments in this kind we ought on this account to press after. This apostle useth the same kind of expression to set forth the greatness and height of what he would deliver to the thoughts of men, 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18. There is in this kind of expression somewhat more insinuated to the mind, than we know how to clothe with any words whatever.

Two things seem principally to be intended.

(1.) That even the saints themselves in such cases ought to be other manner of men than usually they are, under ordinary dispensations of providence. Mistake not; our old measures will not serve; another manner of progress than as yet we have made, is expected from us; it is not ordinary holiness and godliness that is expected from us, under extraordinary calls from God and Christ.

(2.) That our endeavours to be godly and holy, ought to be boundless and endless. No less is included in this apostrophe, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' Not resting in what we have attained, nor what may seem sufficient to keep our heads above water, but an endless and

boundless pressing on. Alas! it will hardly enter into our hearts to think what manner of men we ought to be.

Thirdly, For the matter of this exhortation and inference from the former principle couched in this interrogation, it is, 'All holy conversation and godliness.' The word 'all' is not in the original, but both the other words are in the plural number; 'In holy conversations and godlinesses.' Now these expressions being not proper in our language, the translators have supplied the emphasis and force of them by the addition of the word, 'all:' and there is no just cause of quarrel with them for so doing: only in the original the words are more weighty and emphatical than that supply doth readily reach unto. That which is principally intended, is, that all the concernments whatever of holiness and godliness, are couched in the words. So that two things are in them.

1. The two general parts of that universal duty that we owe to God; and they are these. (1.) Holiness of conversation; which is comprehensive of all holiness and righteousness, both in principle and practice; for no conversation is holy, but what comes from a holy heart, and is carried on to that great and holy end, the glory of God. (2.) Godliness, or the worship of God according to the appointment and institution of Christ. This is the proper importance of εὐσέβεια, as distinct from holiness of conversation; a due adherence to, and observance of, the instituted worship of God.

2. The extent and compass of them both and their degrees. It is not in this or that part of conversation; to be holy in one thing, and loose in another; to be holy in one capacity, and vain in another; to be godly as a private person, and ungodly or selfish as a magistrate; nor is it to observe one part of worship, and despise another: but in all concernments of conversation, in all parts of worship doth this duty lie. 'In all holy conversation and godliness.'

Fourthly, There is the relation that we ought to bear to the universality of holiness and godliness. We ought to be in them: δεῖ ὑπάρχειν ὑμᾶς, 'You ought to be, to exist' in them. In these things is your life; they are not to be followed now and then, as your leisure will serve; but in all

that you do, you ought to be still in these, as in the clothes that you wear, the garment that is on you; be what you will, or where you will, or employed as you are called, yet still you ought to be in holiness and godliness; and what persons you ought to be in them, or how, hath been declared.

Observation. Great providential alterations or destructions made upon the account of Christ and his church, call for eminency of universal holiness and godliness in all believers.

I esteem it my duty to speak somewhat to this proposition, as containing the direction of our great duty in this day. That we have had many providential alterations amongst us, is known to all. What light I have about their relation to Christ and his church, I shall make bold to communicate when I come to the application of the truth in hand, and thereby make way for the pressing of the duty of the text on ourselves in particular: for the present, I confess, I am ashamed and astonished at the deportment of many who are professors in these days; they see and talk of the alterations and dissolutions that God is pleased to make; but what is the improvement that is made hereof? Many take advantage to vent their lusts and passions, some one way, some another; one rejoicing at the ruin of another, as if that were his duty; others repining at the exaltation of another, as if that were their duty; some contriving one form of outward constitutions, others for another (I speak of private persons); but who almost looks to that which is the special call of God under such dispensations? Let us then, I pray you, take a little view of our duty, and the grounds of it; and who knows but that the Lord may by it enlarge and fix our hearts to the love and prosecution of it.

The two great providential alterations and dissolutions that have been, and shall be made on the account of Christ and his church, to which all lesser are either consequent, or do lie in a tendency, are that first of the Judaical church and state, whereof I have spoken; and secondly, that of the antichristian state and worship, whereunto all the shakings of these nations seem to tend in the wisdom of God, although we are not able to discern their influence thereunto.

1. Now for the first of these, we may consider it in its coming as foretold, and as accomplished.

(1.) As it was foretold and threatened by Christ. How were believers cautioned to be ready for it with eminent holiness and watchfulness therein? So Luke xxi. 34. 36. 'Take heed to yourselves; watch therefore.' Why so? 'Christ is coming;' ver. 27. When? Why, 'in this generation;' ver. 32. What to do? Why, 'to dissolve heaven and earth;' ver. 25. to dissolve the Jewish church and state. Watch therefore; give all diligence. So also Matt. xxiv. 42. 'Watch therefore.' Oh! on this account what manner of persons ought we to be?

(2.) As accomplished. See what use the apostle upon it directs believers unto, Heb. xii. 26—28. This is the use, this the call of providence in all these mighty alterations: 'Let us have grace,' strive for it; the nature of the works of God call aloud for an eminent frame of holiness, and close adherence unto God in his worship. I could shew how both the duties of my text are here expressed; but I need not.

2. So is it also in reference to that other great work of God in the world relating to Christ and his church, which is the ocean of providence whereinto all the rivulets of lesser alterations do run; I mean the destruction of antichrist and his Babylonish kingdom.

What a frame shall be in the saints on the close of that work, the Holy Ghost declares at large, Rev. xix. All rejoicing and spiritual communion with God; and whilst the work is on the wheel, those whom God will own in it, he sets his mark on as holy, called, and chosen.

The grounds hereof are,

1. Because in every such providential alteration or dissolution of things on the account of Christ and his church, there is a peculiar coming of Christ himself. He cometh into the world for the work he hath to do: he cometh among his own to fulfil his pleasure among them. Hence such works are called his coming; and the coming of his day. Thus James exhorts these very Jews, to whom Peter here writes, with reference to the same things, Jam. v. 7—9. 'Be patient to the coming of the Lord.' But how could that generation extend their patience to the day of judgment? Nay, saith he, that is not the work I design, but his coming

to take vengeance on his stubborn adversaries, which he saith, ver. 8. 'draweth nigh,' is even at hand: yea, Christ 'the judge standeth before the door,' ver. 9. ready to enter; which also he did within a few years. So upon, or in the destruction of Jerusalem, the same work, Luke xxi. 27. the Son of man is said to 'come in the clouds, and great glory;' and they that escape in that desolation, are said to 'stand before the Son of man;' ver. 36. So, in the ruin and destruction of the Roman empire on the account of their persecution, it is said, 'That the day of the wrath of the Lamb was come;' Rev. vi. 16, 17.

In all such dispensations then, there is a peculiar coming of Christ, a peculiar drawing nigh of him to deal with all sorts of persons in a special manner; though he be oftentimes encompassed with many clouds, and with much darkness, yet he is present exerting his authority, power, wisdom, righteousness, and grace in an eminent manner. It is with him as it is with God in other works, Job ix. 11. though all 'see him not, perceive him not,' yet 'he goeth by,' and 'passeth on.' The lusts, prejudices, corruptions, selfishness, injustice, oppressions of men; the darkness, unbelief, fears, carnal wisdom of the saints themselves; the depth, compass, height, unsearchableness of the path of the wisdom of Christ himself, keeps us in the dark as to his presence in this and that particular; but yet in such dispensations he is come, and passeth on towards the accomplishment of his work, though we perceive it not. Now, 'what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness,' to meet this great King of saints at his coming? What preparation ought there to be? What solemnity of universal holiness for his entertainment? He is in such dispensations continually nigh us, whether we take notice of it or not.

I say, then, if there be a special coming, and a special meeting of Christ in such dispensations, I suppose I may leave the inference unto all holy conversation and godliness with the apostle to the breasts and judgment of them that are concerned. Are we in this work to meet the Lord Jesus? What manner of persons ought we to be?

It may be observed, that Christ puts very great weight on the present frame and course, which he finds men in at his

coming. Matt. xxiv. 46. ‘ Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.’ He annexes blessedness to the frame and course he finds men in at his coming; and waiteth for that hour; ver. 42. Be not asleep when the thief comes to break up the house; take heed that that day take you not unprovided, that you be not overtaken in the midst of the cares of this world. And he complains, that when he comes, he shall not ‘ find faith on the earth.’

But you will say, Is this enough then, that we look to be found in all godliness and holiness at his coming? May we indulge ourselves and our lusts at other seasons, so we be sure to be then provided? Is not the command of duty equal and universal as to all times and seasons? Or is it pointed only unto such dispensations?

Ans. 1. The inference for preparedness for the coming of Christ, is to universal holiness at all seasons, and that upon the account of the uncertainty of it. This our Saviour presseth again and again. You know not at all when it will be, nor how; no not in the least; you believe it not when it is come: ‘I shall not find faith of it in the earth,’ saith Christ. Men will not take notice of it, nor acknowledge it, nor own it, as my coming; wherefore you have no way to be prepared for it, but by universal, perpetual watchfulness.

Ans. 2. The exhortation lies not unto holiness and godliness in general; but as to the degrees of it, what manner of men we ought to be in them. It is not a godly conversation at an ordinary rate that may find acceptance at another time, which will suffice to meet Christ at his coming, and that on sundry accounts after to be mentioned.

I shall at present only treat on some grounds of it from his own person who cometh, and whom we are to meet; and speak of the work he hath to do in his coming afterward.

(1.) On the account of his personal excellencies and holiness. Consider how he is described when he comes to walk among his churches, Rev. i. 13—17. He is full of beauty and glory. When Isaiah saw him, chap. 6. he cries out, ‘ I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips ;’ because of the dread and terror of his holiness. And Peter also, ‘ De-

part from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.' They were not able to bear the thoughts of his glorious holiness so nigh to them. When the holy God of old was to come down among the people at the giving of the law, all the people were to sanctify themselves, and to wash their clothes; Exod. xix. 10, 11. And order was still taken, that no unclean thing might be in the camp, because of the presence of the holy God, though but in a type and resemblance. Whether we observe it or no, if there be any dissolving dispensations among us, that relate to Christ or his church, there is a holy one in the midst of us; or there will be, when any such dispensations shall pass over us. And to think to have to do in the works and ways wherein he hath to do, with hearts unlike and unsuitable unto him, to act our lusts and follies immediately under the eye of his holiness, to set our defiled hands to his pure and holy hands, his soul will abhor it. This is a boldness which he will revenge, that we should bring our neglect and lusts into his holy presence. Christ is in every corner, in every turn of our affairs; and it is incumbent on us to consider how it is fit for us to behave ourselves in his special presence.

(2.) Upon the account of his authority. He who thus comes is the King of saints, and he comes as the King of saints: he comes to exert his regal power and authority, to give a testimony to it in the world. So Isa. lxiii. 1—4. He shews his glory, his might, his kingdom, and authority in this work. So Rev. xix. 12. When he comes to destroy his antichristian enemies, he hath many crowns on his head; he exerciseth his regal power and authority. What is the duty of saints when their King is so nigh them, when he is come into the midst of them, whilst he puts forth the greatness of his power round about them? Will it become them to be neglective of him; to be each man in the pursuit of his own lusts, and ways, and works in the presence of their King? Holiness and godliness hath a due regard to the authority of Christ. Wherever there is a due subjection of soul unto Christ, all holy conversation and godliness will ensue. To be neglective in or of any part of holy conversation, to be careless of any part of worship under the special eye of the Lord of our lives and our worship, is not to be borne with.

(3.) On the account of the present care, kindness, and

love that he is exerting in all such dispensations towards his. It is a time of care and love; the way of his working out the designs of his heart, are indeed ofttimes dark and hid; and his own do not see so clearly how things lie in a tendency to the event and fruits of love. But so it is; Christ comes not but with a design of love and pity towards his, with his heart full of compassion for them. Now, what this calls for at their hands, seeing their holiness and worship is all that his soul is delighted in, is evident unto all.

Put now these things together: every such dispensation is a coming of Christ: the coming of Christ, as it is trying in itself, so it is the coming of the holy King of saints in his love and pity towards them; yea, be the dispensation what it will, never so sharp and severe unto them, yet it is in love and compassion to their souls: their work is to meet this their holy King in the works of his love and power: and 'what manner of persons ought we to be?'

SERMON XXVI.

2. The second ground is, because every such day, is a lesser day of judgment, a forerunner, pledge, and evidence of that great day of the Lord which is to come. God's great and signal judgments in the world, are to be looked on as pledges of the final judgment at the last day. So Jude tells us, that in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, 'God set forth an example of them that shall suffer the vengeance of eternal fire;' ver. 7. And Peter calls the time of the destruction of the Judaical church and state, expressly 'the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men;' 2 Epist. iii. 7. So to the full is the destruction of the Roman persecuting state expressed, Dan. vii. 9, 10. 14. The solemnity of the work and whole procedure bespeaks a great day, a day of judgment; it is so, and a representation of that which is to come. And the like also is set forth, chap. xii. 1—3. And the same description have we of the like day of Christ, Mal. iv. 1.

Every such day, I say then, is a lesser day of judgment, wherein much judging work is accomplished. This Daniel tells us, chap. xii. 10. it is a trying, a purifying, a teaching, a hardening, a bleeding time: there are great works that are done upon the souls and consciences of men, by Christ, in such a day, as well as outwardly, and all in a way of judgment. To let pass then the outward, visible effects of his wrath and power, of his wisdom and righteousness; I shall consider some few of the more secret judiciary acts that the Lord Christ usually exerts in such a day.

(1.) He pleads with all flesh that are concerned in the alterations and desolations he makes. God puts this as one act of his in judgment, that he pleads with men; Ezek. xxxviii. 22. In his judgments he pleads with and against men about their sins. And in that great representation of the day in judgment, Joel iii. 2. God is said to 'plead with all nations.' Now, I say, in general, Christ in such a day pleads with all men concerned. His providences have a voice, and that a contending, pleading voice: unless men

are utterly blinded and hardened, as indeed the most are, they cannot but hear him in his great and mighty works contending with them about their sin and unbelief; representing to them his righteous judgment to come. Though men now cast off things, on this account and that, and being filled with their lusts, passions, fury, revenge, or ease, sensuality, and worldliness, think these things concern them not; yet the day will come, wherein they shall know, that the Lord Christ in his mighty works was pleading even with them also, and that in a way of judgment about their sin and folly.

(2.) In such a day Christ judges and determines the profession of many a false hypocrite, who hath deceived the church and people of God. One great work of the last day shall be the discovery of hypocrites: it is thence principally called 'the day wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.' Many a fair pretender in the world, shall be found to have been an enemy of Christ and the gospel. So is the day of Christ's coming in the flesh represented, Mal. iii. 1, 2. All were high in their professions of desiring his coming, and of delighting in him: but when he came, what was the issue? How few endured the trial! The false, hypocritical, selfish hearts, who had treasured up the hopes of great things to themselves, being discovered by the trials and temptations wherewith his coming was attended, themselves were utterly cast off from their profession, into open enmity to God and his Son. So dealeth the Lord Christ in and under the dispensations whereof we speak, to this day. What by the fury of their own lusts, what by the temptations which lie in their way, what by the advantages they meet withal for the exercise of their vile affections, their hypocrisy is discovered, and themselves cast out of their profession. Notable effects of this acting of Christ as a judge have we seen in the dispensation that is passing over us: some he hath judged by the sentence and judgment of his churches. How many false wretches have been cast out of churches, that have withered under their judgment, and returned no more? Some who have not walked in the order of his churches by him appointed, he hath judged by the world itself, suffered their sin and folly so to break forth, that the world itself hath cast them out from the number of profes-

sors, and owned them as its own. Some have been judged as to their profession of him by strong temptations; that is, their lusts, ambition, selfishness, which have carried them into ways and compliances, wherein they have been compelled to desert, and almost renounce all their former profession. Some have been tried and judged by the errors and abominations of the times, and turned aside from the simplicity of the gospel. Now though there have been, and are, these and many other ways and means of casting men out of, and from the profession that they have made, some good, some bad, some in themselves of a mere passive nature and indifferent; yet they all proceed from Christ, in a judiciary way, they are acts of his, in his day of judgment; and oh, that England might not yet be farther filled with instances and examples of this kind!

(3.) He doth exercise his judgment in blinding and hardening of wicked men; yet they shall not see nor perceive what he is doing, but shall have advantages to do wickedly, and prejudices to blind them therein. So expressly, Dan. xii. 10. 'They shall do wickedly, and they shall not understand.' There are two parts of his judgment in such a day about and against them: first, his giving of them up to their own lusts to do wickedly; 'They shall do wickedly.' Wicked they are, and they shall act accordingly; they shall do it in such a day to the purpose; Rev. xvi. 10, 11. Christ will providentially suffer occasions, advantages, provocations, to lie before them, so that they shall do wickedly to the purpose, they shall have daily fresh occasions to curse, repine, blaspheme, oppose Christ and his interest, or to seek themselves, and the satisfaction of their lusts, which at other times they shall not be able to do. Be they in what condition they will, high or low, exalted or depressed, in power or out of it, they shall in such a season do wickedly, according as their advantages and provocations are. And for men to be given up to their own hearts' lusts, is the next door to the judgment of the great day, when men shall be given up to sin, self, and Satan, unto eternity. Secondly, he blinds them: 'None of the wicked shall understand.' Strange! Who seems so wise and so crafty as they? Who do understand the times, and their advantages in them, more than they? Who more prudent for the management of affairs

than they? But, the truth is, none of them, no, not one of them, shall, or do, or can understand; that is, they understand not the work of Christ, the business and design that he hath in hand; nor what is the true and proper interest of them who are concerned in these dispensations. There are many ways whereby Christ exerts this blinding and infatuating efficacy of his providence towards wicked men in such a day of judgment, that they shall not understand, or know, that he is at all concerned in the works that are in the world.

Sometimes the very things that he doth, are such, and so contrary to the prejudicate opinions of men, that they can never understand that they are things which he will own. How many have been kept from understanding any thing of Christ in the world, in the days wherein we live, from their inveterate prejudices on the account of old superstitions, and forms of government which have been removed; they will rather die, than believe that Christ hath any hand in these things. 'They shall not understand.'

Sometimes the persons by whom he doth them, keep them from understanding. Shall these men save us? These whom they look upon as the offscouring of the earth? Sure if Christ had any work to do in the world, he would make use of other manner of instruments for the accomplishing of them: they are no less offended with the persons that do them, than the things that are done. Christ worketh all this that they should not understand.

Sometimes the manner of doing what he hath to do, the darkness wherewith it is attended, the strange process that he makes, sometimes weak, sometimes foolish, sometimes disorderly to the reasoning of flesh and blood, though all beautiful in itself, and in relation to him.

And sometimes Christ sends a spirit of giddiness into the midst of them, that they shall err and wander in all their ways, and not see nor discern the things that are before them. 'None of the wicked shall understand.'

By these, and many such ways as these, doth Christ in these days of his coming exercise judgment on ungodly men: not to mention the outward destruction, desolation, and perdition, which usually in such seasons he brings upon them.

(4.) He exerciseth judgment at such a time, even among the saints themselves; Psal. lxxxii. 1. he is judging in the great congregation. So Psal. l. 4—8. All this solemnity of proceeding is for the judgment of his own people. And his judging of them is in a plea about their obedience and failing therein. The sum of this his dealing with them is expressed, Rev. iii. 9.

We may then consider, [1.] What it is that Christ pleadeth with his own people about his coming; [2.] What are the ways and means whereby he doth so.

[1.] There are sundry things on the account whereof Christ at his coming pleads with his saints, one or more of them.

1st. On the account of some secret lusts that have defiled them, and which they have either indulged themselves in, or not so vigorously opposed as their loyalty unto Christ required. Times of peace and outward prosperity are usually times wherein, through manifold temptations, even the saints themselves are apt to sully their consciences, and to have breaches made upon their integrity: sometimes in things they do know, and sometimes in things they do not know, nor take notice of. Instances may be given in abundance of such things. In this condition Christ deals with them as Isa. iv. 4. there is blood and filth upon them; the spirit of judgment and burning must be set at work, which, as it principally aims at the internal efficacy of the Spirit in the cleansing of sin, so it respects a time of providential alterations and trials, wherein that work is effectually exerted. Christ in these dispensations speaks secretly to the consciences of his saints, and minds them of this and that folly and miscarriage, and deals with them about it. He asks them if things be not so and so with them? If they have not thus and thus defiled themselves? Whether these hearts are fit to converse with him? And leaves not until their dross and tin be consumed.

2dly. On the account of some way or ways wherein they may have been unadvisedly, or through temptation, or want of seeking counsel aright from him, engaged. They may be got in their employments, in their callings, in the work that lies before them in this world, into ways and paths wherein Christ is not pleased they should make any progress: what

through leaning to their own understandings, what through an inclination of saying a confederacy to them to whom the people say a confederacy, what through the common mistakes in the days wherein they live, even the saints may be engaged in ways that are not according to the mind and will of Christ. Now in such a day of Christ's coming, though he spares the souls of his saints, and forgives them, yet he 'takes vengeance of their inventions;' Psal. xcix. 8. He will cast down all their idols, and destroy and consume every false way wherein they were: one is, it may be, in a way of superstition and false worship; another in a way of pride and ambition; another in a way of giving countenance to the men of the world, and things wherein God delights not. Christ will take vengeance of all these their inventions in the day of his coming; he sits as 'a refiner's fire, and as fuller's soap.'

3dly. On the account of inordinate cleaving unto the shaken, passing things of the world. This is a peculiar controversy that Christ hath with his, upon the account of adherence to the passing world; and it is a thing wherein, when he comes, too many will be found faulty. I might also insist on their unbelief, and other particulars; but,

[2.] The ways and means whereby Christ judgeth and pleadeth with his own, on these accounts, are also various.

1st. He doth it by the afflictions, trials, and troubles, that he exerciseth them with at his coming. The use of the furnace is to take away dross; and the issue of afflictions and trials to take away sin: this is their fruit. So Dan. xii. 1. The time of Christ's coming shall be a day of trouble, such as never was. And what shall be the issue? ver. 10. 'Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.' Their trials and troubles, their great tribulations, shall be purifying and cleansing; though the design of Christ in the issue, at the appointed season, be the peace and deliverance of his saints, yet, in the carrying on of his work, great trials and tribulations may befall them all; and many may fall in the way, and perish as to the outward man. Hence, Dan. xii. 13. there is an appointed time of rest; and it will be a blessed thing for them that shall be preserved unto it; but whilst those days and seasons are coming to their period, there is often 'a time of great trouble;' ver. 1. And 'the power of the holy people may be scattered;' ver. 7. and many afflic-

tions and trials may befall them. Now by these doth Christ plead with his for the consumption of their lusts, and the destruction of their inventions, for the purging and purifying of them. All our trials, pressures, troubles, disappointments, in such a day, are the actings of Christ to this end and purpose. The influences that affliction hath unto these ends, are commonly spoken unto.

2dly. He doth it by pouring out of his Spirit in a singular manner, for this end and purpose, so to plead with, judge, and cleanse his saints. It is in the administration of his Spirit that at his coming 'he sits as a refiner and purifier of silver,' Mal. iii. 1—3. and we see what work he accomplishes thereby. The Holy Ghost, who is the great pleader for the saints, and in them, doth at such a time effectually plead with them, by convictions, persuasions, arguings, application of the word, motions, strivings, and the like. Hence those who are unrefined at such a season, are said in a peculiar manner 'to vex,' to grieve 'the Holy Spirit' of God; Isa. lxiii. 10. His design upon them, is a design of love; and to be rejected, resisted, opposed, in his actings and motions, this grieves and vexes him. Men know not what they do in neglecting the actings of the Holy Ghost, which are peculiarly suited to providential dispensations. When God is great in the world in the works of his providence, in alterations, dissolutions, shakings, changings, removals, and sends his Spirit to move and work in the hearts of men, answerable to his mind and will in these dispensations; so that there is a harmony in the voice of God without and within, both speaking aloud and clearly; then to neglect the workings of the Spirit, brings men into that condition complained of, Ezek. xxiv. 13. 'Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged any more.'

It may be observed, that at such seasons when Christ hath any great and signal work to bring forth in the world, he doth by his Spirit deal with the hearts and consciences of the most wicked and vile men; which, when the secrets of all hearts shall be discovered at the last day, will exceedingly exalt the glory of his wisdom, patience, goodness, holiness, and righteousness. So did he with them before the flood, as is evident from Gen. vi. 3. When an utter destruction was to come, he saith, his 'Spirit shall strive with them

no more;' that is, about their sin and rebellion. That this Spirit was the Spirit of Christ, and that the work of dealing with these ungodly men, was the work of Christ, and that it was a fruit of long-suffering, Peter declares, 1 Epist. iii. 18—20. And if he deals thus with a perishing world, by a work that perisheth also; how much more doth he it in an effectual work upon the hearts of his own? It is the Spirit that speaks to the churches in all their trials, Rev. ii.

By this means, I say then, Christ pleads with his saints, secretly and powerfully judging their lusts, corruptions, failings, consuming and burning them up: he first by frequent motions and instructions gives them no rest in any unequal path; then discovers to them the beauty of holiness, the excellency of the love of Christ, the vanity and folly of every thing that hath interrupted their communion with him, and so fills them with godly sorrow, renunciation of sin, and cleaving unto God; which is the very promise that we have, Ezek. vi. 10.

3dly. As he doth it by the inward, private, effectual operation of his Spirit; so he doth it by the effusion of his light and gifts in the dispensation of the word. Christ seldom brings any great alteration upon the world, but together with it, or to prepare for it, he causeth much effectual light to break forth in the dispensation of his word. Before the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, how he dealt with them he declares, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15. 'And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.' And before the final dissolution of the heavens and earth of that church and state, he preached to them himself in the flesh. A glorious light! Before the ruin of the antichristian world, he sends the angel with the everlasting gospel, and his two witnesses to hold forth the light of the gospel: and we must witness to this his way and wisdom in our generation. Now, though there are many rebels against light, and many whose lusts are enraged by the breaking forth of truth in its beauty and lustre; and many, that being dazzled with it, do run out of its paths into ways of error and folly, and none of the wicked do understand; yet among the saints, the more light, the more holiness; for their light is transforming. This then

is another means whereby, in such a day, Christ consumes the lusts, and judges the inordinate walking of his own, even by the light which in an eminent manner he sends forth in the dispensation of the word.

Now if the time and season whereof we speak, be such a day of judgment, wherein Christ thus pleads with all men, and with his own in an especial manner; I think the inference unto eminency in universal holiness, may be left upon the thoughts and minds of all that are concerned: especially from these considerations doth the inference lie strong unto the ensuing particulars, in the ways of holiness and godliness: First, Of self-searching, and self-judging in reference to our state and condition. Dreadful are the actings of Christ in such a day on the souls and consciences, ofttimes on the names and lives of corrupt, unsound professors: in part I declared them before. If any now should be found in such a condition, his day of judgment is come, his sealing to destruction. This the apostle calls to in such a dispensation; 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32. Self-judging, as to our state and condition, ways and practices, is a great principle of holy conversation and godliness. When Christ comes to judge, we ought surely to judge ourselves; and abounding in that work is a great means of preservation from the temptations of the days whereunto we are exposed. Secondly, Of weanedness from the world and the things thereof. Christ's coming puts vanity on all these passing things. This is surely contained in the text; 'Seeing that these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons,' &c. At best they are vain and passing uncertain things; in such a dispensation as is spoken of, they are all obnoxious to dissolution, and many of them certainly to be removed and taken away. And why should the heart of any one be set upon them? Why should we not fix our souls on things more profitable, more durable? It is no small matter to meet the Lord Christ at his coming; Mal. iii. 1—3. They were all full of desires of the coming of Christ; they sought after him: 'The Lord whom ye seek.' They delighted in the thoughts of him: 'Whom ye delight in.' Well, he came according to their desires; he whom they sought was found. And what was the issue? Why very few of them would abide the day of his coming, or stand when he appeared. He had a work to do they could

not away with. They desired his coming; they desired the day of the Lord; but as the prophet says, Amos v. 18. 'Woe unto them, to what end have they desired it? it was darkness to them, not light.' That was the coming of Christ in person to his temple; it is not otherwise in any of his other comings in providential dispensations. Many men long for it, delight in it; it is our duty so to do: but what is the issue? One is hardened in sin and lust; another is lifted up as though himself were something, when he is nothing; a third stumbles at the coming itself, and falls; 'Woe unto them, the day of the Lord is darkness unto them, and not light.'

I proceed now to the use. But to make way for the due improvement of the apostle's exhortation unto us, some previous considerations must be laid down.

First, It is known to all the world, that we have had great providential alterations and dissolutions in these nations. He must be a stranger, not in England only, but in Europe, almost in the whole world, that knows it not. Our heavens and our earth, our sea and our dry land have been not only shaken, but removed also. The heavens of ancient and glorious fabric, both civil and ecclesiastical, have been taken down by fire and sword, and the fervent heat of God's displeasure. It is needless for me to declare, what destructions, what dissolutions, what unparalleled alterations we have had in these nations: persons, things, forms of government of old established, and newly-framed constitutions, we have seen all obnoxious to change or ruin.

Secondly, It is no less certain, that we may say concerning all these things, 'Come and see what God hath wrought.' And as to these desolations of nations, ruin of families, alterations of governments, we may say of them all as the Psalmist, Psal. xlvi. 8. 'Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth.' It is his work, he hath done it himself: 'there is no evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it;' Amos iii. 6. Have there been any exaltations of men, recoveries from depression, relief of the oppressed, establishments of new frames and order of things? It hath been all from him; Dan. ii. 21. iv. 32. Indeed the days wherein we live, are full of practical atheism; some out of mere stoutness of heart and innate

unbelief will take no notice of God in all these things; Psal. x. 4. 'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.' As things have been, so they suppose they are, and will be; but as to the consideration of him who disposeth of all as seems good unto him, they are strangers unto it. Some have had their lusts enraged, and themselves so provoked and disappointed, that flying upon the instruments which God hath used, they have been filled with prejudice, and utterly blinded as to any discovery of the ways or work of God in these revolutions. Some have been utterly cast down in their thoughts, because they have not been able to discover the righteousness, beauty, and order, of the ways of God, his footsteps having been in the deep, while his paths have not been known. And some having found an open door for the satisfaction of their lusts, pride, covetousness, ambition, love of the world, reputation, vain-glory, and uncleanness; have been so greedily engaged in the pursuit of them, that they have taken little or no notice of the hand of God in these things. And others are at a stand like the Philistine priests and diviners; 1 Sam. vi. 9. They know not whether all this hath been from the hand of God, or whether some chance hath befallen us. I shall not need to mention those in Isa. xlvii. 13. astrologers, star-gazers, and monthly prognosticators, who have endeavoured also to divert the thoughts of unbelieving, foolish men, from a due consideration of the author of all our revolutions. To all which I shall answer in general in the words of Hannah, 1 Sam. ii. 3—9. God hath done all these things; and men that will not take notice of him, and his proceedings, shall at length be forced so to do; Isa. xxvi. 11.

These things being premised; one principal inquiry, which must be the bottom and foundation of the ensuing directions, is, whether it may appear that these providential alterations and dissolutions have related to Christ and his interest in the world in an especial manner.

That we may yet a little farther clear our way, you may farther observe, what I intend, by relating unto Christ and his church in an especial manner.

1. Whereas the Lord Christ is by the appointment of the Father 'made heir of all things,' Heb. i. 2. and 'hath all

judgment committed unto him,' over all flesh, in all the world; which include his right to send his gospel into what nation and place he pleaseth: so all the alterations that are in the world, all things relate to him, and do lie in a remote tendency to the advancement of his glory. He will work out his own glorious ends from all the breakings of all the nations in the world; even where the interest of his gospel seems outwardly to be very little or nothing at all. But it is not in this sense that we make our inquiry; for so there would be nothing peculiar in the works that have been among us.

2. Things may relate unto Christ and his church, upon the account of special promise. Christ hath a special and peculiar concernment in providential dissolutions, when they so relate to him; and that appears in these things:

(1.) When the judgments that are exercised in such a dispensation, flow from provocations given unto the Lord Christ, upon the account of his church. So Isa. xxxiv. 8. All the dissolutions mentioned of the heavens and the earth, ver. 4. were on Zion's account; and the controversy that Christ had with Idumea about her. So chap. lxiii. 4. the day of vengeance, is the year of the redeemed. Whence in such a day, the saints themselves are stirred up to take notice, that the desolations wrought in the earth, are on their account, Jer. li. 35. and so it is fully expressed in the ruin of antichristian Babylon in the Revelations: where then there is a peculiar relation of any dissolving providence unto Christ and his church, the judgments exerted in and under it, regard the vengeance of the church, and proceed from the provocations of Christ on that account.

(2.) Some promises made unto Christ concerning his inheritance; some promises of Christ unto his church are in such a day brought forth unto accomplishment. The promises of Christ to the church are of two sorts: First, General, essential to the new covenant: and these belong equally to all saints, of all ages, in all places, not to one more than another. Every saint hath an equal right and interest in the essential promises of the covenant with any other saint whatever; there is no difference, but one God, Lord, and Father of all, is good unto them all alike. And, secondly, There are promises which are peculiarly suited to

the several states and conditions into which the visible kingdom of Christ is in his wisdom to be brought in several ages. Such are the promises of the calling of the Jews, of the destruction of antichrist, of the increase of light in the latter days, of the peace, rest, and prosperity of the church in some times or ages, after trials and tribulation. Now they are the promises of this latter sort, that relate unto providential dispensations.

Having premised these things, I shall now briefly offer some grounds of hope, that such have been the alterations and dissolutions wherein we have been exercised in this generation:

First, Because very many of the saints of God have obtained real, evident, soul refreshing communion with Christ in and about these things, on this foundation, that the things on the wheel amongst us have had a peculiar relation unto him. There is nothing of more certainty to the souls of any, than what they have real, spiritual experience of. When the things about which they are conversant lie only in notion, and are rationally discoursed or debated, much deceit may lie under all. But when things between God and the soul come to be realized by practical experience, they give a never failing certainty of themselves. Now by holding communion about these things with Christ, I understand the exercise of faith, love, hope, expectation, delight on and in Christ on the one hand, and the receiving relief, supportment, consolation, joy, patience, perseverance on the other: from both which, holiness, faithfulness, and thankfulness have proceeded, and been increased. Now this communion with Christ, in and about the works of his providence amongst us, very many of the saints have obtained; and, which is the height and complement of it, died in the clear visions of Christ in such communion. Now there are two things that offer sufficient security against any deceit or mistake in this thing:

1. The goodness, care, and faithfulness of God towards his own, which will not suffer us to fear that he would lead all his people into such a temptation, wherein, in their chiefest communion, as they apprehended, with himself, they should feed on the wind and delusion. If the foundation of all this intercourse with God was false, and not

according to his mind, then so was the whole superstructure. Now that God for many years should lead his people into a way of prayer, faith, hope, thankfulness, and yet all false and an abominable thing, because all leaning on a false ground and supposition, none that consider his goodness and tender pity towards his own, with the delight of his soul in their worship and ways, can once imagine. It is true, men may be zealously engaged in ways and acts of worship, and that all their lives, wherein they think they do God good service; and yet both they and their service be abominated by him for ever. But men cannot do so in faith, love, obedience, thankfulness, which alone we speak of. At least, he will not suffer his saints to do so, of whom alone we speak. We have then the tender mercies and faithfulness of God to assure us in this case.

2. The self-evidencing efficacy of faith in spiritual experiences strengthens their persuasion. Many doubtless may persuade themselves that they have communion with God, and yet feed upon ashes; and a deceived heart turns them aside. The principle of such a delusion, I shall not now lay open. But when it is indeed obtained by faith, it is always accompanied with a soul quieting, refreshing evidence; for faith in its operation will evince itself to the soul where it is. I do not say, it always doth so. It may be so clouded with darkness of mind; so overpowered by temptations, that in its most spiritual and genuine acting, it may be hid from the soul wherein it is, which we find to be the condition of many a gracious soul; but in itself, it clears up its own actings. Things that have a self-evidencing power, may be hindered from exerting it; but when they do exert it, it is evident. Put a candle under a bushel, it cannot be seen; but take away the hinderance, and it manifests itself. It is so in faith, and its actings. They may be so clouded to the soul itself in which they act, that it may not be able to attain any comforting evidence of it. But take away the bushel, fear, prejudices, temptations, corrupt reasonings, and it will assure the soul of itself and its working. Neither is its working more evident than its fruit, or the product of its operations in the soul; it brings forth love, rest, peace, all with a spiritual sense upon the heart and spirit. Now these have been in this thing so evident in the souls of the

saints, that they have bespoken that faith which cannot deceive nor be deceived.

The bottom then of the communion which the saints had with Christ in this work, and have, must either be faith or fancy: if faith, then the communion was and is real, and the work true that it is built upon. That it was not, that it is not, the fancy or imagination of a deluded heart, may appear from these considerations:

(1.) From its extent. We know it possessed the minds of the universality of believers in this nation, who were not, nor are at this day, combined in our political interest, but are wofully divided among themselves; yet have all had, more or less, this persuasion of the work relating unto Christ. Now that this should be any corrupt imagination, seems to me impossible. I speak not of outward actions and proceedings; for so, I know whole nations may politically combine in evil; though I will not believe, that ever the generality of the saints of Christ shall do so. But I speak of the frame of their hearts and spirits as to communion with Christ in faith and love, whereunto no outward reasonings or interests could influence them in the least: 'Digitus Dei est hoc.'

(2.) It appears from the permanency, and flourishing of this principle in straits and difficulties. A corrupt imagination, be it never so strong and vigorous in its season, and whilst its food is administered to it, in the temptation it lives upon; yet in trials, great and pressing, it sinks and withers; or if the difficulty continue, for the most part, unless where it falls on some natures of an unconquerable pertinacy, utterly vanisheth. But now, this principle of the saints' communion with Christ about the work of our generation, was never more active, vigorous, and flourishing, did never more evidence itself to be of a divine extract, than in the greatest straits and difficulties, in the mouth and entrance of the greatest deaths. Then did it commonly rise up to its greatest heights and assurance. Our temptations, whether Christ be in this work or no, have, for the most part, befallen us since we had deliverance from pressing, bloody troubles. And I think I may say, that there are very many saints in these nations, who can truly say, that the best and the most comfortable days that ever they saw

in their lives, were those wherein they were exercised with the greatest fears, dangers and troubles, and that upon the account of the strengthening of this principle of communion with Christ. And in very many hath it been tried out to the death, when corrupt fancies were of little worth.

(3.) It appears from the fruits of this persuasion. Every corrupt imagination and fancy is of the flesh; and the works of the flesh are manifest. Whatever it may do in conjunction with convictions and for a season, yet in itself, and in a course it will bring forth no fruit, but what tends to the satisfaction of the flesh. But now the principle under consideration, did bring forth fruits unto God, in godliness and righteousness.

But you will say, do we not see what fruit it hath brought forth? Is not the land full of the steam of the lusts of men engaged in the work of this age? Can hell itself afford a worse savour than is sent forth by many of them?

Ans. 1. Very many who have been engaged, never pretended to ought of this principle, but followed professedly on carnal, at best rational and human accounts solely. Now these being men of the world, and being fallen into days of notable temptations, no wonder if their lusts work and tumultuate, and that to purpose. The principle is not to suffer for their miscarriages who renounce it.

Ans. 2. There was a mixed multitude which in this business went up with the people of God, who pretended to this principle indeed, and talked, and spake of the interest of Christ; but knowing nothing of the power of it, when these men were brought into the wilderness, and there met with provocations on the one hand, and temptations on the other, they fell a lusting, and indeed they have pursued and acted their lusts to purpose also, which have been indeed the more abominable; in that some of them have still the impudence to pretend this principle of faith as to the interest of Christ, which teacheth no such things, nor produceth any such fruits as they abound withal.

Ans. 3. Many who have really the power of this principle in them, have yet been overpowered by temptations, and have brought forth fruits directly opposite unto that obedience, and holiness, and self-denial, which the principle

spoken of tends unto. This, for the most part, hath fallen out since deliverance came in; and so the vigour of faith, raised by daily exercise, was much decayed. None therefore of these things can be charged on the principle itself, whose natural, genuine effects we have experienced to be such as no corrupt fancy, or imagination could produce.

Many other reasons of this nature might be insisted on; but this is my first ground.

Secondly, Because in this, much work hath been really done for Christ. Whatever have been the designs of any, or all of the sons of men, Christ hath done so much for himself, as I can from thence with confidence conclude, that the whole hath related unto him. Indeed in the work he doth, his interest ofttimes lies very much in the dark, yea, is utterly hid from the instruments he employs. Little did the Medes and Persians think, in the destruction of Babylon, that they were executing the vengeance of Zion, and the blood of Jerusalem, a poor city ruined sixty or seventy years before. And when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, little did they think whose work they had in hand. And whatever instruments thought or intended, Christ hath done notable work for himself. The destruction of false worship as established by a law, the casting down of combinations for persecution, are no small works. I say, much work hath been done for Christ. There was a generation of men that were risen to a strange height in the contempt of the Spirit, and ways of Christ, combined in a resolution to oppose and persecute all the appearance of him either by light or holiness in his saints, setting up an outside, formal worship, in opposition unto the spiritual worship of the gospel. And upon the account of the light and truth which he began to command forth in those days, an unspeakable aggravation attended their guilt; in the pursuit of whose design, some were imprisoned, some banished into the ends of the earth, some beggared, many ruined, and given up to death itself. Now what work hath Christ made in these days on the men of that generation? What vengeance hath he taken on them? This is certain, not to insist on particulars, that whatever new sort or combination of men may rise up in their spirit and design, and whatever success they may obtain, yet the generality of the men of that provocation, at

least, the heads and rulers of it, are already sealed up under the indignation of the Lord Jesus, and the vengeance he takes for Zion. I shall not insist on more particulars; the wasting and destruction of the most eminent persecutors of the saints, the ruin and destruction of civil and ecclesiastical fabrics and combinations of men, designing the opposing and persecuting of the Spirit of Christ, the removal of all that false worship under the pretence whereof they persecuted all the spiritual appearances of Christ, hath been all work done for him.

Thirdly, The breaking forth of much glorious gospel light under this dispensation, evinces its relation unto Christ. Look upon the like outward work at any other time in the world. What is the issue of war, blood, confusion? Is it not darkness, ignorance, blindness, barrenness? Hath it not been so in other places of the world? But now in the coming forth of Christ, though he hath a sword in one hand, yet he hath the sun in the other; though he cause darkness in the destruction and desolation that attend his vengeance, yet he gives light and faith to his saints; Mal. iv. 1, 2. Christ never comes for vengeance only; his chief design is love. Love brings forth light; and that which reveals him more to his saints, and which endears his saints more to him. But I have manifested before, that he brings light with him; and he hath done so in this dispensation. Light as to the mysteries of the gospel; light as to the riches of his grace; light as to the way of his worship, of his ordinances and institutions, hath broken out amongst us. As Dan. xii. 4. It is such a day he speaks of.

I know how obnoxious this observation is to a sad objection. Call you these days of light, and knowledge? Say you that truth hath shined forth, or been diffused? Is it increased, or more scattered abroad? Is not the contrary true?

Ans. It cannot be denied, but that many grievous and enormous abominations have been broached in these times under the name and pretence of light and truth. But is that singular to these days? Hath it not been so upon every appearance of Christ? As the light hath been, so hath been the pretence of it in error and darkness. No sooner was Christ come in the flesh, but instantly there

were many false Christs: Lo, here is Christ and there is Christ, was common language in those days; as, This is the only way, and that is the only way, is now; and yet the true Christ was in the world. And whatever light at any time comes forth, some mock; false light about the same thing immediately breaks forth. So was it in the first spreading of the gospel; so in the late reformation, and so in our days; and this is no evidence against the coming of Christ, but rather for it. For,

1. Satan pours out this flood of abominations, on purpose to bring an ill report upon the truth and light that is sent out by Christ. The great prejudice against truth in the world is, that it is new. 'He seems to be a setter forth of strange' or new 'gods,' say they, of Paul; because he preached Jesus, and the resurrection. To increase this prejudice, the devil with it or after it sends forth his darkness; which, first, enables the world to load the truth itself with reproaches, whilst it comes accompanied with such follies, as though it also were of the number. Secondly, It disables weak friends to find out and close with the truth amidst so many false pretenders. Where much false money is abroad in the world, every man cannot discern, and receive only that which is good. Much less will men always keep safe, when they are so unstable and uncertain, as they are for the most part about choosing of truth.

2. God permits it so to be.

(1.) For the trial of careless professors. There must be heresies, that the approved may be tried. Most men are apt to content themselves with a lazy profession. They will hold to the truth whilst nothing appears but truth. Let error come with the same pretences and advantage, they are for that also. Now God delights to judge such persons even in this world; to manifest that they are not of the truth, that they never received it in the love thereof. And he sifts and tries the elect by it, and that for many advantages, not now to be insisted on. As, first, that they may experiment the efficacy of truth: Secondly, His power in their preservation: Thirdly, That they may hold truth upon firm and abiding grounds.

(2.) God permits it to set a greater lustre and esteem upon truth. Truth, when it is sought after, when it is con-

tended for, when it is experimented in its power and efficacy, is rendered glorious and beautiful; and all these with innumerable other advantages it hath by the competition that is set up against it by error. When men keep to the truth by the power of God, and the sense of its sweetness and usefulness to their own souls, and shall see some by their errors turned aside to one abomination, some to another, some made to wither by them and under them, they discern the excellency of the truth they embrace. So that notwithstanding this exception, the observation stands good.

Fourthly, It appears from the general nature of the dispensation itself, which clearly answers the predictions that are of the great works to be accomplished in the latter days, upon the account of Christ and his church. This is a general head, whose particulars I shall not enter into. They cannot be managed without a consideration of all, at least, of the most principal prophecies of the last times, and of the kingdom of Christ as to its enlargement, beauty, and glory in them; too large a task for me to enter upon at present.

And these are some of the grounds on which I am persuaded, that the alterations and providential dissolutions of these days, have related unto, and do lie in a subserviency to the interest of Christ and his church; whatever be the issue of the individual persons who have been engaged therein.

Come we now to the uses.

SERMON XXVII.

Use 1. Of trial or examination.

Hath Christ for many years now been in an especial manner come amongst us? Do these alterations relate to him and his interest; and so require universal holiness and godliness? Let us then in the first place see, whether in their several stations the men of this generation have walked answerable to such a dispensation. Christ indeed hath done his work; but have we done ours? He hath destroyed many of his enemies, judged false professors, hardened and blinded the wicked world, sent out his Spirit to plead with his people, and taken vengeance on their inventions, he hath given out plentiful measures of truth and light: but now the whole inquiry is, Whether all or any of us have answered the mind of Christ in these dispensations, and prepared ourselves to meet him as becometh his greatness and holiness?

For the generality of the people of the nation, Christ hath been pleading with them about their unbelief, worldliness, atheism, and contempt of the gospel. And what hath been the issue? Alas! he that was filthy is filthy still; he that was profane is so still; swearers, drunkards, and other vicious persons are so still. Where is that man in a thousand in the nation, that takes notice of any peculiar plea of Christ with him about his sin, in any of these dispensations? One cries out of one party of men, another curses another party, a third is angry with God himself; but as to the call of Christ in his mighty appearances, who almost takes any notice of it? The abominable pride, folly, vanity, luxury that are found in this city, testify to their faces, that the voice of wisdom is not heard in the cry of fools. And whereas Christ's peculiar controversy with this nation hath been about the contempt of the gospel; is there any ground got upon the generality of men? Is any reformation wrought on this account among them? Nay, may we not say freely, that there is a greater spirit of hatred, enmity, and opposition to Christ, and the gospel risen up in the nation than ever before? Light hath provoked and enraged them, so

that they hate the gospel more than ever. How mad are the generality of the people on and after their idols, their old superstitious ways of worship which Christ hath witnessed against? What an enmity against the very doctrine of the gospel? What a combination in all places is there against the reforming dispensation of it? And is this any good omen of a comfortable issue of this dispensation? Is not Christ ready to say of such a people, 'Why should you be smitten any more, you will revolt more and more?' and to swear in his wrath, that 'they shall not enter into his rest?' Nay, may he not justly take his gospel from us, and give it to a people that will bring forth fruit? O England, that in this thy day, thou hadst known the things of thy peace! I fear they will be hidden from thee. The temptations of the day, the divisions of thy teachers, with other their miscarriages, and thine own lusts, have deceived thee, and without mercy, insuperable mercy, will ruin thee. Shall this shame be thy glory that Christ hath not conquered thee, that thou hast hardened thyself against him?

But passing them, let us inquire, whether the mind of Christ hath in these dispensations been answered in a due manner by the saints themselves? Have they made it their business to meet him in all holy conversation and godliness? Indeed to me, the contrary appears upon these considerations: (1.) Their great differences among themselves about lesser things; (2.) Their little difference from the world in great things; (3.) The general miscarriage of them all, in things prejudicial to the progress of the gospel; (4.) The particular deviation of some into ways of scandal and offence; (5) The backsliding of most if not of all of them.

(1.) Consider their great differences among themselves about lesser things. I cannot insist on the weight that is laid by our Saviour on the union of his disciples; with the condescension and love which he requires of them to that purpose; the motives and exhortations given by the Holy Ghost unto them on that account; the provision of principles and means made in the gospel for it; the necessity of it to the promotion of the interest of Christ in the world; the benefit and advantage of it to the saints themselves; the testimony given by it to the power of Christ, and truth of his word; the blasphemies and woful soul-ruining offences that

ensue on the contrary frame; the weakening of faith, hindrance of prayer, quenching of zeal, strengthening of the men of the world, that attend the neglect of it: I must not, I say, insist on these things; but see John xvii. 21—23. and Phil. ii. 1—3. of a hundred places that might be mentioned; how little the mind of Christ, and his expectation at his coming hath been answered by his saints in this particular, is evident unto all.

[1.] Who is there almost who having got any private opinion, true or false, wherein he differs from all or any of his brethren, who is not ready to proclaim it, without due regard to scandal and division, and even to quarrel with and divide from all that will not think as he thinks, and speak as he speaks? Now the pride, self-fulness, vanity of mind, unlikeness to Christ, folly, want of faith and love that is in such a frame can never be expressed, nor sufficiently lamented. Christ abhors such a frame of spirit, as he doth the pollution of the world.

[2.] Neither is this all; but men will lay more weight on their mint and cummin, on the lesser things, wherein they differ from their brethren, spend more time about them, write more books of them, labour more in their prosecution, than they will do in and about the weighty things of law and gospel; all which will appear at length to have been but the laying of hay and stubble on the foundation, that must be consumed.

[3.] And farther; men fall to judging and censuring each other, as to their interest in Christ, or their eternal condition. By what rule? the everlasting gospel? the covenant of grace? no; but of the disciples: 'Master, they follow not with us.' They that believe not our opinion, we are apt to think believe not in Jesus Christ; and because we delight not in them, that Christ does not delight in them. This digs up the roots of love, weakens prayer, increases evil surmises, which are of the works of the flesh, genders strife, and contempt; things that the soul of Christ abhors.

[4.] The abomination of this wickedness ends not here; persecution, banishment, the blood of one another hath on this account lain in the hearts and minds of some of the saints themselves: not only have expressions to that purpose broken out from particular men; but it is to be feared,

that designs for it have been managed by parties and combinations. And are they not ready to dress up one another with such names and titles as may fit them for ruin? Sectaries, heretics, schismatics on the one side; priests, antichristian dogs on the other: and all this while Christ is in the midst of us! And doth this answer the expectation of Christ? Is this a preparation to meet him in all holy conversation and godliness? Can we render ourselves more unlike him, more unmeet for communion with him? Are not saints ready to join with the world against saints? To take the vilest men into their bosom, that will close with them in defaming, deriding, or it may be, destroying their brethren? Doth Christ look for this usage in the house of his friends?

(2.) Consider their little difference from the world in great things. The great separation that Christ requires and commands of his saints, is, from the world: he died to redeem them from it, and out of it; to deliver them from the present evil world, the ways, works, fellowship, and ends of it; so providing, that in all holy conversation his people should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations.

Now there are five things wherein Christ calls for his own to be differenced from the world, and the men thereof: [1.] In spirit; [2.] In principle; [3.] In conversation; [4.] In ends; [5.] In worship.

[1.] In spirit. He tells us everywhere, that it is one spirit that is in his, another that is in the world; 1 John iv. 4. 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.' There is a 'he' in you, and a 'he' in the world, and they are different and opposite. There is dwelling in you the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, nor doth it know him; John xiv. 17. And when his disciples began to act in the power of a carnal spirit, he tells them, they 'knew not what spirit they were of.'

[2.] In principle. The principle that Christ requires in his saints, is faith working by love, and guided by that wisdom which is from above; 1 Tim. i. 5. Here are the saints' principles, I mean, should be so of all their operations. A pure heart and love, which is the end of all faith, is their great principle; this cleanses the conscience, and so sets them on work; by this they take in strength for operation

from Christ, without whom they can do nothing; John xv. 5. By this they receive light and guidance from Christ, and that wisdom which is from above, enabling them to order their affairs with discretion; Jam. iii. 17, 18. Now the principle that is in the world, is self, self acted and guided by carnal wisdom, which is sensual and devilish; on the account whereof, they despise the principle and actings of the saints; Psal. xiv. 6.

[3.] In conversation. He 'hath redeemed us from a vain conversation;' 1 Pet. i. 18. There is a peculiar emphasis put upon a conversation that becomes the gospel. There is a twofold conversation; one that becometh the world, and the men of the world; another that becometh the gospel, and the profession thereof: that these be kept unmixed is the great exhortation of the apostle, Rom. xii. 2. And if you would know wherein a worldly conversation consists, the apostle telleth us, 1 John ii. 16. A conversation wherein any of these things bear sway, is a conversation of this world. That all holiness, all manner of holiness, universal holiness and godliness is in the gospel conversation to which the saints are called, shall be afterward spoken unto.

[4.] In ends. There is a double end of men's working and acting in this world: 1st. General, which regulates the course of their lives and conversations; 2dly. Particular, which regulates their particular actings and works: and in both these are the saints and the world differenced.

1st. The general end of the saints is the glory of God; this lies in their eye, in their design; how God may be glorified by them, his name exalted, his interest promoted; this way the bent of their minds and spirits tend. The general end of the men of the world is self; all is resolved into self; whatever they do or act in public or private, whatever their pretence be, yet self is their end; self-admiration, self-ostentation, self-satisfaction, all centres in self. Sometimes indeed they may perform things that seem to be of a public tendency, for the good of mankind, the good of nations, yea, it may be the good of the church; so that it is hard for themselves to discover, or for others to charge them, it may be, that they act for self. But there are these two things that will evince men to make self their general end and aim, even then when they act for public ends.

(1st.) This is a rule that will not fail men: whatever in public actings is not done with a single eye for the glory of God, is done for self. These two divide all the general ends of men; and where one is not enthroned, the other is. Now though some men may so far proceed in public actings, that it may not be evident wherein their self-interest lies, though that also be but seldom, yet if they do not eye the glory of God with a single eye in these their actings, it is all for self, and so it will be found at the last day. Now how few will be left not turning into self on this rule, now pretences run so high of public aims, might be easily evinced. It were no hard matter to discover, how in things of a public tendency, men make some fleshly imagination or other the god they worship; so that be enthroned, they are little solicitous about the glory of God himself.

(2dly.) The difference of these ends even in public actings may be seen from the ways, means, and frame of spirit in which they are carried on. Let men pretend what they will to public ends, yet if they press after them with a proud, carnal, wrathful, envious, spirit, by the ways, wisdom, and in the spirit of the world, without faith and submission to God, it is self and not God that is their aim. And this also might be improved to strip men of glorying in their public designs, were that my present business. Jehu's spirit spoiled his work.

2dly. There is a particular end that regulates the public actings of men. This in the saints is their doing the work of their generation; that, as Noah, they may walk with God in their generation. This is their integrity as to the special course of their lives, and their particular employment, how they may fulfil the work of their generation. The special end of the men of the world, is the satisfaction of one particular lust or other. Will this increase my wealth, my power, my carnal interest in this world, my reputation for wisdom and ability, or give me advantage to grow in this or that corrupt end, in particular? This is the secret inquiry of their deceived hearts; this influences and regulates all their particular actings.

[5.] As to their separation in worship, I shall only point to that one place, and leave it, 2 Cor. vi. 14—18. and chap. vii. 1. which belongs to that discourse.

Now I wish I had a more difficult task in hand: I wish it were harder for me to manage any principle of conviction, that we have not been prepared to meet Christ in his coming, from this consideration of our little difference from the world in these great things of principle, spirit, walking, ends, and worship. For

What a fleshly, wrathful, carnal, worldly spirit hath discovered itself in many professors, nay, in the most? How little of the humble, lowly, meek, loving spirit of Christ? Many think it their glory to be unlike Christ in the spirit of their minds, high, heady, self-full, proud, revengeful: what little difference between them, and the men of the world? How like to one another? What oneness is found in them? Is this to learn Christ? To put on Christ? Is this the image of Christ, that manifests itself in most professors? Nor

Are they at a distance from the world, as to the principle of their walking and working. Do they walk by faith, and work by faith? Are they guided by the wisdom that is from above? Make they God their refuge? Or are any men more dipped into a principle of carnal wisdom, than most professors are? To seek counsel of God, to take the law of their proceedings at his mouth, to look up to him for guidance and direction, to derive strength from the Lord Christ by believing for the work of their employments; in how few are these things found? Their own wisdom, their own counsel, their own contrivance, their own abilities, shall do their work. Carnal policy, and fleshly wisdom are their net and drag.

Moreover, what is our conversation? How like the world in our persons, in our families, in our spirits, callings, in whatever the world may properly call its own? Professors have justled the men of the world out of the possession of the ways of the world. How few are found walking in a world-condemning conversation? a gospel-glorifying conversation? a fruitful, holy conversation? We are known from the world by word more than by deed; which is not the way that James directs us unto.

I might go through with the rest of the considerations mentioned, and manifest that there is another evil found amongst us; for as we have great differences among our-

selves about little things, so we have little difference from the world in those which are great and weighty.

(3.) Consider the general miscarriage almost of all professors in things prejudicial to the advancement of the gospel; the pretence, whereof we have served ourselves all along, hath been of the furtherance, propagation, and advancement of the gospel. Our Lord Christ hath sent out light, and given opportunities suitable unto such a design. Never greater advantages, nor greater opportunities from the foundation of the world. If ever they be required at the hands of this generation, they will be found to have been so: whence then hath it been, that the work hath not gone on and prospered? Why doth it yet stick? Hath it not been from the woful miscarriage of those, who were looked on as the means and instruments of carrying it on? Have there been a few saints in a place? It is odds, that they have been at variance among themselves, and made sport for the vain multitude by their divisions: or they have walked frowardly, provokingly, uselessly, worldly, that their pretence for the gospel hath been despised, because of their persons. Have they, as men concerned in the honour of Christ and the gospel, as men enjoying the blessed principle of his Spirit, laboured to be useful, fruitful, to do good to all, to be meek, lowly, self-denying, charitable, abounding in good works, patient towards opposers, not reviling again, not returning evil for evil, bearing, suffering, committing all to Christ? Alas, how few are there who have so walked! Could some see believers making it their business to be like Christ in the world, to deny themselves as he did, to do good to all as he did, to be patient under persecution and reproaches as he was, to be tender, pitiful, merciful like him, to abide in faith and prayer as he did; what might we not expect, as to the advancement of the gospel amongst us? We complain of cold preaching among ministers, of dead and dull attendance in hearers, of contempt of the word in the most, whereby the power of the gospel is kept within narrow bounds; but the truth is, the prejudices that have been raised by the miscarriages of professors, have had a greater influence unto that evil event, than any of the rest. And hath this been to meet Christ in his coming?

(4.) Of the like nature are the scandalous offences of

many. I shall not insist on the scandalous apostacies of many professors, who, some by one great sin, some by another, are fallen off from the profession of the gospel. I wish that too many other instances might not be found among them that remain. Are there not some proud unto scandal, or sensual unto scandal, or covetous unto scandal, or negligent of their families and relations unto scandal, or conformable to the ways, customs, and fashions of the world unto scandal? I wish no such things might be found among us.

(5.) Add hereunto, the general backsliding, or going back from God, that is amongst professors; we scarce seem to be the same generation of men that we were fifteen or sixteen years ago: some have utterly lost their principle. Zeal for God, reformation, purity of ordinances, interest of Christ in his saints, are things to be despised, things that have no concernment in our condition and affairs; as though we had no more need of Christ, or his interest amongst us: and in the best, is not a fresh spirit of our present engagement almost lost?

But why should I insist farther on these things? Are not the things that have been spoken, sufficient for a rebuke, or a conviction at least, that the professing people of Christ have not walked as though they had a just respect to his coming, or his peculiar presence amongst them? May we not justly fear, that our multiplied provocations may at length prevail with him to withdraw, to put a stop to his work that is upon the wheel; not only to leave us to manifold entanglements in the carrying of it on, but also utterly to forsake it, to cast down the tower, and pluck up the hedge that he hath made about his vineyard, and leave it to be laid waste? He must have a heart like the flint in the rock of stone, that doth not tremble at it. But complaints will not be our relief. That which is incumbent on us, if yet there may be hope, is our answering the exhortation in my text. If then any sense do fall upon our spirits, that Christ is come amongst us in a peculiar manner, in the providential alterations and dissolutions that have been among us; and that we have not hitherto demeaned ourselves as becometh them who are called to meet him, and to walk with him in such ways and paths as his amongst us have been; then I say, let

us apply ourselves in our next use to the exhortation that lies before us, to all manner of 'holy conversation.'

Use 2. Of exhortation. That I say then which we are now to attend unto, is the exhortation that is included in this expression: 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' To further the efficacy of this exhortation, give me leave to premise some few things.

First, There are general reasons of holiness and godliness, and there are special motives unto them. I am not now dealing upon the general reasons of holiness on the account of the covenant of grace, and so shall not press it on those considerations, upon believers as such. But I speak of it in reference unto the peculiar motive mentioned in the text; namely, The providential dissolution of temporal concernments, and so speak to believers as men interested therein, as persons whom Christ hath a special regard unto in these his dispensations. It is one thing to say, What manner of persons ought ye to be, whom God hath loved with an everlasting love, whom Christ hath washed in his own blood, who have received the Spirit of Christ? and another to say, Ye that are loved with an everlasting love, are washed in the blood of Christ, and made partakers of the Holy Ghost. Seeing that Christ is come amongst us, to the dissolution of the great things of the nations, what manner of persons ought you to be? That is it in a peculiar pressing unto holiness on the account of the motive that is intended.

Secondly, There is a holiness and godliness that is required universally at all times, in all places and seasons, and in all persons whatever by the gospel; and there is a peculiar improvement of that holiness and godliness at some seasons, and in some persons, that is not required at some times, and of some persons. Christ hath work for all the grace of his people in this world; and according as opportunities for that work are presented unto them, they ought to stir up their grace for it. In the times of Christ's coming, he hath great work to do for and by the holiness and godliness of his people: a great testimony is to be given to himself thereby; his work is much to be promoted by it; the world to be convinced, condemned, his judgments against them justified in the sight of all; and much more hath Christ to do with the holiness of his people at such a season. Now

it is this peculiar improvement of covenant gospel holiness that is required; not only that holiness that is indispensably incumbent on us by the virtue of the covenant, but that heightening and improvement of it which the season wherein we live, and the work that Christ hath to do, do require of us.

These things being premised, let us now proceed to the management of our exhortation; and observe,

(1.) That the apostle calls us to a consideration how this work may be effected: 'What manner of persons ought ye to be?' Consider with yourselves the equity of the matter, the greatness of the motive, and the ways whereby it may be answered. The business is not now to be left at an ordinary rate, nor unto private meditations; it is to be made a matter of solemn consideration and design; it is to be managed with advice and counsel: consider, I say, 'what manner of persons.' It is not about holiness in general that I speak, but about that holiness which becomes us in such a season. This then is the first part of this exhortation, that as to the improvement of holiness answerable to the season of this coming of Christ, we would carry it on by design, by counsel, by deliberate consideration; not only labouring to be holy ourselves, but to promote the work of holiness, the eminency, the activity, the usefulness of it in one another, in all believers, so far as our prayers, exhortations and examples can reach. This the apostle pleads for on the same account, Heb. iii. 13. and chap. x. 23, 24. to the same purpose. And we have the practice of it, Mal. iii. 16. It was such a time and season as that we treat of, Christ was coming to his temple, ver. 1—3. The earth was full of wickedness and contempt of him. What do the saints do? Do they content themselves with their ordinary measures? Do they keep all close to themselves? No, they confer, advise, consult, and that frequently, how, wherein, whereby the expectation of their coming Lord may be answered. The reasons, arguments, way of carrying on such a counsel and design, the apostle declares, Rom. xiii. 11—14. The time requires it, the duty is urgent, temptations are many, failings have been great, the Lord is nigh at hand. Let then believers enter together into this plot, this design, draw as many as they can into it, promote it by all ways and means possible. Let them get together; make this their aim, their

design, engage in it as the duty of their day, of their time and season. This would be a plot that the men of the world would have more just cause to fear, than ever they had of any, and yet dare not question, disturb, or interrupt. A design that would blow up their contrivance, disappoint their counsel, ruin their interest, shake heaven and earth. Let every one contribute the best of his counsel, the best of his grace, the best of his interest in heaven, the utmost of his self-denial to the carrying of it on. Methinks we have dwelt long enough upon others' failings, fruitless, selfish designs; the world is full of the noise, the steam, the filth of them. Oh, that the stream of our endeavours might now be another way! Oh, that God would stir up some that might stand up and cry, Who is for God? Who is on our side, for holiness now? If ministers at their meetings; if Christians at theirs would make this their business; if all would agree to sacrifice their lusts, their self-love, their by-opinions to this work, what glory would redound to Christ? What salvation would be wrought in the earth? Why do any of us lie complaining? Let us up and be doing, there is no doubt, no question to be made; this is that which Christ lengthens his controversy with us about, that he will bring us to, or ruin us, and destroy us as to this world. Ministers meet: What do they? Pray awhile, and spend their time in and about differences, controversies, how they may do this or that which I shall not name. Christians meet, and pray, and go away as they came. Lusts are not sacrificed; faults are not confessed to one another; exhortations mutual are not used; no ground is got for holiness or godliness, but things remain as they did, or rather grow worse and worse every day; at best profession rises, and the power of religion falls and decreases.

I heartily wish professors would be persuaded to come together, to advise, to consult for God, for the glory of Christ and the gospel, and for their own interest in this thing: to consider what are the pressing temptations of the days wherein we live; what are the corruptions and lusts that are apt to be provoked and excited by these temptations, or by the state of things amongst us; what duties seem to be neglected; and what are the common, visible failings and scandal of professors, wherein themselves through

party, or neglect, or selfishness have been wanting; and to advise and pray for the remedying of all these evils. I wish they would seriously stir up and exhort one another, to contend mightily for the crucifying of all their secret lusts and bosom sins; for heart purity, and likeness to Christ in all things: that they would incite others, and draw all they can into their society and combination in all parts of the nation. In particular, let not us of this place stand still, expecting when others will begin the work; the meaner, poorer, worse we are, the more incumbent is it on us to rise and be doing; the water is moved, teaching is in it, and we strive not who shall enter first, but rather stand striving, contesting with others, to put them before us.

This is the first direction: let us make the matter of holiness and godliness, suited to the coming of Christ, a business of design, counsel, and common engagement. Whereunto every one may contribute of the store which from God he hath received. Blessed will be those servants, whom their Master, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

SERMON XXVIII.

I SHALL now add some cautions as to the pursuit of the first direction.

[1.] Take heed of a degeneration into self-righteousness. Intendments of holiness have more than once been ruined by Satan through this deceit: they have set out upon conviction, and ended in pharisaism. Now this hath been done many ways.

(1st.) Some really convinced of the vanity of an empty profession, and of boasting of saintship upon the account of faith and light without holiness and godliness, which was the way of many when James and John wrote their epistles, fall to dispute and contend, as well they may, for the absolute necessity of holiness and strict obedience, of fruitfulness and good works. But Satan here gets advantage upon men's natural spirits, their heats, and contentions, and insinuates an inherent righteousness, upon the account whereof we should under one pretence or other expect acceptation with God, as to the justification of our persons. So he prevailed upon the Galatians. The way is narrow and strait that lies between the indispensable necessity of holiness, and its influence into our righteousness. Because no faith will justify us before God, but that also which will justify itself by fruitfulness before men, a great mistake arises, as though what it doth for its own justification were to be reckoned unto ours. Many in our days have gone off from the mystery of the gospel on this account.

2dly. It prevails from a secret self-pleasing, that is apt to grow on the minds of men, from a singularity in the performance of duties. This is that which the heart-searcher aims to prevent in his command, that 'when we have done all, we should say, we are unprofitable servants;' that is, in the secrets of our hearts to sit down in a sense of our own worthlessness. And here lies another great practical difficulty, namely, to have the rejoicing of a good conscience in our integrity and constancy in duties, without a reflection upon something of self, that the soul may please itself, and

rest in. Nehemiah fixes on the medium, chap. xiii. 22. He had in the sight of God the testimony of his conscience, concerning the service he had done for the house of God; but as to the rest, he winds up all in mercy, pardon, and grace. 'God, I thank thee I am not as other men,' is apt to creep into the heart in a strict course of duties. And this self-pleasing is the very root of self-righteousness, which as it may defile the saints themselves, so it will destroy those who only in the strength of their convictions go forth after a holiness and righteousness; for it quickly produceth the deadly poisonous effect of spiritual pride, which is the greatest assimilation to the nature of the devil that the nature of man is capable of.

3dly. Our own holiness hath an advantage upon spiritual sense against the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of Christ, is utterly a strange thing to the best of unbelievers; and this puts them by all means upon the setting up of their own; Rom. x. 3. And believers themselves know it only by faith, Rom. i. 17. which is 'of things not seen.' But what we are ourselves, what we do, what we aim at, and in what manner, this we have a near sense of. And holiness is apt to insinuate itself into the conscience with a beauty that is none of its own, to proffer itself to the soul's embraces instead of Jesus Christ. Its native beauty consists in its answering the will of God, conforming the soul to the likeness of Christ, and being useful in the world, in a covenant of mere mercy. From its presence, and the sense we have of it, the heart is apt to put a varnish and false beauty upon it, as to the relief of conscience upon the account of justification. As it was of old with the children of Israel, when Moses was in the mount, and not seen, nor had they any visible pledge of the presence of God, instantly they turned their gold into a calf that would be always present with them. Being in the dark as to the righteousness of Christ, which is as it were, absent from them, men set up their own holiness in the stead of it; which, though of itself it be of God, yet turned into self-righteousness, is but a calf, an idol, that cannot save them.

This is my first caution. But that we may make the better improvement of it, as unto present practice, I shall add some evidences of the prevalency, or at least contending

of self-righteousness for an interest in the soul, under a pretence of duty and holiness. As,

(1st.) When under a design of holiness, there is an increase of a bondage frame of spirit. When the mind begins to be enslaved to the duties which it doth itself perform. When that amplitude, freedom, and largeness of mind, which is in a gracious frame of heart, decays; and a servile, bondage-frame grows in the room of it, so that the soul doth what it doth under this notion, that it dare not do otherwise. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;' 2 Cor. iii. 17. Those that come to Christ, he makes free; John viii. 36. There is freedom and spiritual largeness of heart unto obedience and duty. A will unto duty enlarged, dilated, and sweetened by love, delight, joy, complacency in the matter of obedience, is the freedom we speak of. This frame, I confess, is not always alike prevalent in gracious souls: they may have things ready to die; sin within, temptations without, desertion from God, all of them together, each of them may disturb this harmony, and bring them for a time, it may be a long time, under an indisposition unto such a frame: but this is for the most part predominant. When such a frame decays, or is not, all endeavours, pains, attempts, severities in duties, do all relate to the law, to bondage; and consequently lead to self-righteousness, fear, subjection of conscience to duties, not God in Christ in the duty, fluctuating of peace according to performances; the soul in its strictest course had need fear a snare.

(2.) Increasing in form, and withering in power. Forms are of three sorts: [1st.] Those of institution; [2dly.] Moral; [3dly.] Arbitrary in conversation.

[1st.] There are forms and ways of worship, whereof some are, and all pretend to be, of Christ's institution. Let us at present take it for granted, that they are all what they are apprehended to be, namely, from Christ. For a man to grow high, earnest, zealous, in and about them, to be strict and severe in contending for them, and yet find no spiritual refreshment in them, or communion with God, nor to grow in faith and love by them, is to dwell on the confines of self-righteousness, if not hypocrisy. This was the very sin of the Jews, about their institutions so much condemned in the Scripture. None use instituted ways or forms of wor-

ship profitably, but such as find communion with God in them, or are seriously humbled because they do not.

[2dly.] The outward form of moral duties, that depend not merely on institution, is the same. Such are praying, preaching, hearing, abounding in them without a suitable increase in grace, power, liberty, love, meekness, lowliness of mind, argues, though under the highest light to the contrary, a real mixture of self.

[3dly.] There are also outward forms in conversation, that are used to the same purpose. We have had some who have changed their outward form in a few years, as often as Laban changed Jacob's wages. What shape they will next turn themselves into, I know not. This is not going from strength to strength, and increasing in life and power, but from one shape to another; and in their word and prophecy is directly proportioned, and answerable in its outward appearance to the administration of the Old Testament, and not at all to the spiritual dispensation of the New. So it may be feared that in the principle of their obedience, they lie under a legal bondage and self-righteousness, which hath utterly spoiled that which perhaps in its first design set out for mortification and holiness.

(3dly.) Where self-righteousness is getting ground, these two, bondage and form, at length bring forth burdensomeness and wearisomeness. This God charges on such justiciaries, Isa. xliii. 22. 'Thou hast been weary of me.' The ways and worship of God grow very grievous and burdensome to such a soul. He is a stranger to that of the apostle, 'His commandments are not grievous:' and that of our Saviour himself, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden light.' The easiness of the yoke of Christ ariseth from the assistance that is given to him that bears it by the Holy Ghost; as also the connaturalness that is wrought in the heart to all the duties of it. Both these accompany a gospel frame. But when a soul is deserted of these, the yoke grows heavy, and galleth him, but yet he must go on; this is from self-righteousness. Let this then be our first caution.

[2.] Take heed of monastic uselessness. I am persuaded monkery came into the world not only with a glorious pretence, but also with a sincere intention. Men weary of the ways, weary of the lusts, and sin of the world, designing

personal holiness left their stations, and withdrew themselves into retirement. David was almost gone with this design; Psal. lv. 6. 'O that I had wings,' and Jer. ix. 2. 'O that I had a lodging in the wilderness.' Whose heart hath not been exercised with reasonings of this kind? Oh that we could be freed from the incumbrances and provocations of this world; what manner of persons might we be in all holy conversation and godliness? But consider,

1st. What success this design prosecuted hath had in others. How quickly did it degenerate into wretched superstition, and was thereon blasted and rejected of God?

2dly. God can suffer temptation to pursue us into a wilderness, that shall more obstruct us in the progress of holiness, than all the difficulties we meet withal in this world. It is not of what kind our temptations are, but what assistance we are to expect under them, that we are to look after.

3dly. Not our communion, but God's work is to be considered. God hath work to do in this world, and to desert it because of its difficulties and entanglements, is to cast off his authority. Universal holiness is required of us, that we may do the will of God in our generation; Gen. vi. 9. It is not enough that we be just, that we be righteous, and walk with God in holiness; but we must also serve our generation, as David did, before he fell asleep. God hath a work to do, and not to help him, is to oppose him.

[3.] Take heed of laying a design for holiness in a subserviency unto any carnal interest; of crying with Jehu, 'Come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts,' thereby to do our own work, and compass our own ends. The great scandal that hath befallen the days wherein we live, and which hath hardened the spirits of many against all the ways of God, is, that religion, godliness, zeal, holiness, have been made a cloak for carnal and secular ends. What of this hath been really given, and what hath been taken on false imaginations, the last day will discover. In the mean time this is certain, that there is a corruption in the heart of man, rising up to such a visible prostitution of the whole profession of religion, which of all things must be carefully avoided.

And this is the grand exhortation that I shall insist on: let it be our design to promote generation holiness in ourselves and others, with the cautions insisted on.

(2.) That which in the next place is considerable, is the proposing of the ingredients that lie in the motive to holiness here expressed by the apostle: 'Seeing that these things shall be dissolved.' As,

[1.] It will be a furtherance of holiness to take off our hearts from an esteem and valuation of all things, that are so obnoxious to dissolution. An estimation or valuation of earthly things is on all accounts the greatest hinderance to the promotion of holiness. Earthly-mindedness, pride of spirit, elation above our brethren, self-estimation, carnal confidence, contempt of the wisdom and grace of others, aptness to wrath and anger; some, or all of these, always accompany such a frame.

The apostle also makes this an effectual means of the improvement of holiness, that the mind be taken off from the delightful contemplation of visible things; 2 Cor. iv. 18. Things will work towards 'a weight of glory:' in which words the apostle alludes to the Hebrew word, כבוד 'glory,' which comes from a root, signifying to 'weigh,' or 'to be heavy;' that being the only weighty thing, and all others light and of no moment. This way, I say, things will work, whilst our minds are taken off from things that are seen. The mind's valuation of them is as great an obstruction to the growth of holiness, as any thing whatever that can beset us in our pilgrimage. Now what can give a greater allay to the warmth of our thoughts and minds, than their continual obnoxiousness to dissolution and change? This the apostle makes his argument everywhere. They are temporal things, saith he, things that abide not, things obnoxious to change and ruin: 'The world passeth away, and the figure of it. Wilt thou set thine heart upon that which is not?' And there lies the force of the inference under consideration: 'Seeing that these things shall be dissolved,' and it may be in a way of judgment, in a dreadful, fearful manner; how is it incumbent on us to fix our hearts on more durable things, to choose the better part, the better portion? What advantage can it be to enlarge our hearts to the love of the things that are upon the wing? To cleave to parting things with our affections? To grow in our desires after that which withdraws itself from us continually? Let us then consider, how many duties have been omitted, how many

temptations have been offered, and objected to us; how many spiritual frames of heart prevented or expelled; how much looseness and vanity of mind introduced; how much self-confidence promoted, by an over-valuation of these things: and we shall then see what influence a watching against it may have to the furtherance of a design of holiness.

[2.] It will be so, to take off our care about them. This also is a worm that lies at the root of obedience, and is of itself able to wither it, if not removed. Our Lord Jesus Christ, giving us instruction how we should be prepared for the coming of such a day, as that whereof we are speaking, charges us, among other things, to take heed that we 'be not overcharged with the cares of this life;' Luke xxi. 34. Indeed there is nothing so opposite to that peculiar holiness and godliness that is required of us in and under great providential dissolutions, as this of care about perishing things. The special holiness that we press after, is a due mixture of faith, love, self-denial, fruitfulness, all working in a peculiar and eminent manner. Now to every one of these is this care a canker and a gangrene, fitted to eat out and devour the life and spirit of them. The very nature of faith consists in a universal casting of our care on God; 1 Pet. v. 7. 'Cast all your care on him.' All our care about temporal, spiritual, eternal things, let us cast all this on God, our whole burden; this is believing, this is faith: and what is more opposite unto it, than this care and solicitousness of the soul about the obtaining or retaining of these things? Resignation, acquiescency, rest, all which are acts or effects of faith, are devoured by it. Trust in God, affiance, delight in his will, ruins them all. How can a soul glorify God in believing in a difficult season, that is overlaid with this distemper? Nothing is more diametrically opposite thereunto.

Love enlarges the heart to Christ, and every thing of Christ; valuation, delight, satisfaction accompany it: it makes the heart free, noble, ready for service, compassionate, zealous; nothing is more called for in such a day: and the decay of faith in the trials and temptations of such a season, is called, the 'waxing cold of love;' as the fruit decays, when the root is consumed. To think of glorifying God in the days wherein we live, without hearts warmed, enlarged, made tender, compassionate by gospel love, is to think to

fly without wings, or to walk without feet. What day almost, what business, wherein our love is not put to the trial in all the properties of it; whether it can bear and forbear; whether it can pity and relieve; whether it can hope all things, and believe all things; whether it can exercise itself towards friends and towards enemies; whether it can give allowance for men's weakness and temptations; whether it can value Christ above all, and rejoice in him in the loss of all; and many the like things is it continually tried withal. Now nothing so contracts and withers the heart, as to all these things, as the cares of this world do. Whatever is selfish, fearful, unbelieving, is inwrapped in them. They sometimes pine, wither, and render useless the whole man, always drink up the spirit, and deprive it of any communion with God in any thing it hath to do.

The same may be said concerning self-denial and fruitfulness; which in an eminent manner Christ now calls upon us for. Love, care, and fear about the things that shall be dissolved, unframes the soul for them.

On these considerations, and the like which might be added, may this direction be improved, and no small obstacle unto a course of universal holiness and godliness, be taken away. Is the power, are the riches, the pleasures of the world valuable? Alas! they are all passing away. It is but 'yet a little while, and their place shall know them no more.' Yet could we take off our hearts from an undue valuation of these things, and care about them, half our work was done.

(3.) That which remains for the closing of our discourse on this subject, is to give some few motives unto the duty proposed: and I shall only mention three generals: [1.] Relating unto ourselves; [2.] Unto others; [3.] Unto Christ himself.

[1.] As to ourselves; this alone will maintain peace and quiet in our souls in and under those dissolutions of things that we are to be exercised with. We know what desolations, what ruin of families, what destruction of all outward enjoyments in many, they have already in these nations been attended with: and we know not how soon, nor by what ways or means, the bitterest part of the cup, as to outward pressures and calamities, may become our portion. We

have seen somewhat of the beginning of the work of Christ; where he will cease, what he hath yet farther to do, we know not. Our concernment then certainly was never greater than it is at this day, to keep up peace and rest within. If there should be a confederacy of outward and inward trouble, who can stand before it? A wounded body, a wounded, it may be, ruined estate, and a wounded spirit altogether, who can bear? This is that alone which the world cannot take from us; which is not obnoxious to sword, fire, plots, conspiracies, nothing without us: even the peace that is left us, left to our own keeping, through the Holy Ghost by Jesus Christ. It is not committed to parliaments, to armies, to rulers to keep for us; it is committed to our own souls to keep, through the Holy Ghost, and no man can take it from us. Again, as it is valuable on this account, that it cannot be taken from us; so on this also, that it will countervail and support us under the loss of all that can. Peace in God, rest in sole retirement, quietness, and security of mind on spiritual gospel accounts, sense of God's love in Christ, will support and keep life and vigour in the soul in the loss of outward peace, with whatever is desirable and valuable unto us on any account that relates to this world.

Now there is no maintaining of this peace and rest in such a season, without the performance of this duty. So dealt Habbakuk, chap. iii. 16. 'I trembled in myself that I might rest in the day of trouble.' That which God required of him in that season, that he brought up his soul unto, that he might have rest; and his endeavour had the glorious issue mentioned, ver. 17, 18. Though spiritual peace may radically and virtually live under many sins and provocations; yet it will not flourish under them, or bring forth any refreshing fruit. To have the fruit and effect of peace under a continuance in any known sin, is impossible. Now the omission of any known duty, is a known sin; and that a peculiar pressing after eminency in universal holiness and godliness in such a season is a known duty, I have before evinced: no maintaining of inward peace, rest in God without it: and we shall be sure to be tried, whether it be in us of a truth, or not. I discourse not what the carnal security of seared, blinded, hardened sinners will do; but I am sure, the weak, tottering, uncertain peace of many believers, will

not support them in such trials, as it is not only possible that we may, but probable that we shall meet withal. Would you now desire that your Master should find you unprepared; that he should make his entrance whilst all things were in disorder? If the heavens should thunder over you, and the earth tremble under you, and the sword stand ready to devour; oh! what sad thoughts must you have, if at the same time you should be forced to say, oh my soul, is not God mine enemy also? May not wrath, and hell, and judgment be at the end of this dispensation? What is the reason, that a very rumour, a noise oftentimes is ready to fill many of our souls with such disturbances? Is it not because this peace doth not flourish in the inward man? And what shall we do in the day of trial itself? Let us then endeavour as Peter exhorts, 2 Epist. iii. 14. 'to be found of Christ in peace.' And what may we do that we may be found of him in peace? Why, saith he, 'be without spot and blameless.' Let him come when he will, in what way he pleases, we shall be found in a way of peace, if we be found spotless and blameless in a way of holiness: 'And blessed is that servant, whom his Master, when he cometh shall find so doing.' This will give light in a dungeon, as it did to Paul and Silas; ease in the fire, in the furnace, as to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; contentment in the loss of all, as it did to Job; satisfaction on the foresight of future trouble, as it did to David, 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.' Whatever sword be in the hand of Christ; whatever fire or tempest be before him, and round about him; what vengeance soever he is to take on any, or all of the sons of men, this peace kept up by the holiness he requires in such a season, will make a way to his bosom-love, and there repose the soul in rest and quietness.

[2.] As to others, what Paul saith to Timothy, in another case about preaching of the gospel, may in some sense be spoken in this: 'Take heed,' saith he, 'to the doctrine; for thereby thou shalt save thyself, and them that hear thee.' Who knows but that hereby we may save ourselves, and the nation wherein we live. The Lord Christ hath certainly a controversy with these nations, he hath begun to deal with them in his indignation; and we know that there are provo-

cations enough amongst us, to stir him up unto our ruin. Who knows, I say, but that by meeting him in a way of generation-holiness, we may divert deserved ruin, at least hinder that it be not brought upon us for the provocations of his sons and daughters?

Now there are several ways, whereby this may have an influence into the safety and deliverance of the nations themselves.

1st. By setting all things right between Christ and the saints, that he may have no need farther to shake the earth, and dissolve the heavens of the nations, to awaken his own from their security, to loosen them from perishing things, or to accomplish any other glorious end towards them. Christ sometimes sifts nations, that his wheat may be separated from the chaff; he sets nations on fire, that they may be a furnace for the trial of his own; and when their dross is cleansed, he will quench his fire. When there was but one saint in a ship, yet it was for his sake that a storm came on all the rest. It is not always for the sins of the wicked, that they may be destroyed, that he comes in a way of judgment; but for the sins of his people, that they may be cleansed. So 'judgment,' as Peter speaks, 'begins at the house of God.' It is not unlikely, that our troubles were brought on these nations, for the sins of the nations in their persecution of Christ, his truths, and saints against great light. Nor is it less unlikely, that troubles are continued on these nations, for the sins of the saints themselves, such as those before insisted on. Now what is it that in such trials Christ calls for, and which he will not cease calling for, until he prevails? Is it not the work which we are in the pursuit of, weanedness from the world, self-denial, zeal for truth, humbleness, fruitfulness, faithfulness, universal holiness? If here then lies the root of Christ's controversy with these nations, as most probably it doth; if this be the cause of our troubles, as to me questionless it is, an engagement into the pursuit of this work, is the only remedy and cure of the evils that we either feel or fear in these nations. Other remedies have been tried, and all in vain. O that we had hearts through the Holy Ghost to make trial of this, which the great physician Jesus Christ hath prescribed unto us! Heaven and earth call for it at our hands: the nations groan under our sin; if

we regard not ourselves, yet let us make it our business to deliver England out of the hand of the Lord; Josh. xxii. 31.

2dly. In that it may be an effectual means for the reformation of the nation. Reformation is the great thing that we have been talking of many years; and this hath been our condition in our attempts after it; the more that light for it hath broken forth amongst us, the more unreformed hath the body of the people been, yea, the more opposite for the most part unto reformation; and may not this, among other things, be one occasion, yea, the principal cause of it; the light of truth hath been accompanied with so many scandals in some, with so little power and evidence in the most, that prejudices have been strengthened in the minds of men against all that hath been pretended or professed. I am persuaded, that a design for generation-holiness, carried on according to the light that we have received, would have a greater influence on the the minds of the men of the world to look after reformation, than any of our entreaties or exhortations have yet obtained. We are contemptible to the nation in our pressing after reformation, whilst we are divided amongst ourselves, conformable to the world; whilst we proclaim our unmortified lusts, pride, covetousness, ambition, revenge, self-seeking. Would all the people of God stir up themselves to shew forth the power of that faith and life they have received, and so take away advantage from obdurate opposers of the gospel, and give an eminent example to others, who now abhor them on the account of many prejudices that they have taken; the nation would be more awakened unto their duty than now they are. Were we agreed and united on this principle, that we would jointly and severally make this our design; what work might be wrought in families, counsels, counties, cities? Now reformation is acknowledged to be the means, the only means of the preservation of a nation, and this the only means of that.

3dly. This is the most effectual way of standing in the gap, to turn away the indignation of the Lord against the nation. Whatever is required thereunto, is contained in this design of holiness; there is reformation, there is wrestling by prayer, sundry promises improving our interest in Christ, all included in this duty. Now this is the most common way of saving nations. When wrath is ready to break forth, some

Moses or Samuel, stands up, and pleads for a deliverance, and prevails. Says God, Destroy not the cluster; there is a blessing in it. When the greatest and most dreadful judgment, that God ever executed on sinners in this world, was coming forth, had there been ten persons following after holiness, its accomplishment had been prevented. Here then we have a project to save three nations by; and without this, in vain shall they use any other remedies, they shall not be healed.

[3.] Consider this thing, how it relates unto Christ and his glory. All the revenue of glory or honour that we bring unto Christ in this world, is by our obedience or holiness. He did not die for us, that we might be great, or wise, or learned, or powerful in the world; but that he might purify us to be a peculiar people unto himself, zealous of good works. This was his design and aim, that he might have a holy people, a faithful people in the world. He tells us, that herein his Father is glorified, that we bear much fruit; not that we be successful, that we rule and prevail, that we are in credit and reputation, but that we bring forth much fruit; and in the glory of the Father, is the Son glorified also. It is this alone that adorns the doctrine of his gospel, and lifts up his name in the world; but especially is Christ glorified, by the holiness of his saints in such a season; because

1st. Thereby we bear witness to the world, that indeed we believe him to be come forth amongst us, and that the works that are on the wheel relate to his kingdom and interest. Let us talk of it whilst we please, unless we live and walk as those who have communion with Christ in the works he doth, the world will yet think that whatever we profess, yet indeed we believe as they do, that it is a common thing that hath befallen us. But when indeed they shall see, that there is a real reverence of his person upon our spirits, and that we bestir ourselves in his ways, like servants in the presence of their master; this carries a conviction along with it. To hear men talk of the coming of Christ, and the day of Christ, and the great and terrible things that Christ hath done in these days; and yet in the mean time to walk as the men of the world, in a spirit of pride, selfishness, and wrath, in sensuality or pleasure, in neglect of prayer and humiliation: yea, of all gospel duties, swearers and drunkards do

not so dishonour Christ as such men do. But let men but see professors making it their business to be holy, humble, self-denying, useful in the world, condescending in love, resigning all to God, they cannot but say, Well, this is a great day to the saints; they verily believe that Christ is among them. This is a professing that brings conviction; words are but as speaking with tongues, that work not out the glory of Christ.

2dly. Thereby we bear witness unto what sort of kingdom it is, that Christ hath in the world, and what a kind of king he is. I cannot but fear that our talking of the kingdom of Christ, and managing our notions of it, at least in the world's apprehensions, to carnal advantages, hath been a notable hinderance of the coming of it forth in beauty and glory amongst us. Every party talks of the kingdom of Christ, some more, some less, all pretend unto it; but it is evident, that many would set him on his throne with the petition of Zebedee's children in their mouths, that they may sit on his right hand, and his left. Hence the world doth really persuade itself, and is hardened every day in that persuasion, that whatever is pretended of Christ, it is self-interest that carries all before it; and that men do entertain that notion for the promotion of self-ends. But now this design of abounding in real holiness sets up the pure, unmixed interest of Christ, and casts a conviction upon the world to that purpose. When the world may read in our lives, that the kingdom we look for, though it be in this world, yet it is not indeed of this world, but is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; this brings that honour to Christ, wherein he is delighted; and the ignorance of foolish men is put to silence.

3dly. This brings honour unto Christ, and glorifies him in all the vengeance that he executes on his enemies, and all the care that he takes of his own. The world itself is hereby made to see, that there is a real difference indeed in them, between whom Christ puts a difference, and is convinced of the righteousness of his judgments. Every one may answer them, when they inquire the reason of the dispensations amongst us. Yea, they may answer themselves, the Lord hath done great things for these, even these that serve him.

SERMON XXIX.*

HUMAN POWER DEFEATED.

The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands.—Psal. lxxvi. 5.

The common circumstances of this psalm, concerning the penman, title, and the like, I shall not at all inquire after. The time of its being given to the church is alone to us considerable; and yet all the knowledge thereof also is but conjectural. What particular time it was wherein it was given, we know not; but that it was given for the use of all times, that we know. Probable it is, from ver. 3. that it was established as a monument of praise in the days of Hezekiah, when by the immediate hand of God, Jerusalem was delivered from the army of Sennacherib. For a return of which mercy, though good Hezekiah came short of the obligation laid on him, rendering not again according to the benefit done unto him; yet the Lord himself takes care for his own glory, setting forth this psalm as a monument of the praise due to his name unto all generations.

The deliverance of Jerusalem then from so great ruin, as that impending over it from the threatening army of Sennacherib under their walls, being the occasion of penning this psalm, it cannot but yield us a meet foundation of making mention of the name of the Lord in a suitable work this day.

In general, the whole is eucharistical, and hath two parts: First, Narratory, concerning the work of God for his people. Secondly, Laudatory, or the praise of his people for those works.

The first part, hath three particulars:

1. An exordium, by way of exultation and rejoicing, ver. 1, 2.

* Upon the defeat of the Levellers at Burford, May 18, 1642. This sermon was preached before the Parliament, June 7, following, as appears by Whitlock's Memoirs, fol. 321 col. 2.

2. A special narration of the work of God, for which the praise of the whole is intended, ver. 3. 5, 6.

3. An apostrophe to the Lord concerning the one, and the other, ver. 4.

The latter containeth,

1. A doctrinal observation for the use of the church from the whole, ver. 7.

2. The reasons and confirmation of the doctrine so laid down, taken from the power and righteousness of God in the actions recounted, ver. 8, 9.

3. A threefold use of the doctrine so confirmed. Of instruction, ver. 10. Of exhortation, ver. 11. Of establishment and consolation, ver. 12.

The particulars preceding my text I shall a little touch upon, that the mind of the Holy Ghost therein may be the more clear unto you, and the doctrine from thence appear with the greater evidence.

1. In the exordium, ver. 1, 2. you have two things: (1.) The names of the place wherein the work mentioned was wrought, and the praise returned held forth; and these are Judah, Israel, Salem, Zion. (2.) The relation of God unto this place, which lies at the bottom of the work he did for them, and the praise they returned unto him. He was known, his name was great amongst them; there was his tabernacle and his dwelling-place, which may be referred to two heads; the knowledge of his will, ver. 1. and the establishment of his worship, ver. 2.

(1.) For the description of the place, by its several names and titles, I shall not insist upon it; they are all but various expressions of the same thing. It is the church of God that is adorned with all these titles, and names of singular endearment. Judah, that single tribe of which the Messiah was to come; Israel, a prevailing people, the posterity of him that prevailed with God; Salem, the place he chose above all the places of the earth to settle his name therein; and Zion, the choice ornament of that Salem, a model wherein the beauty and excellency of all the other are contracted; whose gates were then so dear unto the Lord. Or perhaps, you have the distribution of the whole into its several parts; Judah, the governing tribe; Israel, the body of the people; Salem, the chief place of their residence and glory; and

Zion, the presence of God in his worship amongst them all. Now the mention of these titles of the church, so dear to the Lord, doth front the following narration, to afford us this observation.

Observation. The care of Salem, of Zion, lies at the bottom of all God's powerful actings and workings among the sons of men. Every mighty work of God throughout the world, may be prefaced with these two verses. The whole course of affairs in the world, is steered by providence in reference to the good of Salem; Zion hath been the rise and downfall of all the powers of the world; it is her deliverance or trial that is intended in their raising, and her recompense and vengeance in their ruin. God works not among the nations for their own sakes. When they are sifted with a sieve, they are but the chaff, Israel is the corn, for whose sake it is done, whereof not the least grain shall fall to the ground; Amos ix. 9. 'She is precious in God's sight and honourable; he loved her; therefore he giveth men for her and people for her life;' Isa. xliii. 4. The men of the world are very apt to pride themselves in their thoughts, as though great were their share and interest in the glorious things that God is accomplishing; like a fly that sat on the chariot wheel, and cried, What a dust have I raised round about? The truth is, their names are written in the dust, and they are of no account in the eyes of the Lord in all he is accomplishing, but only to exalt his name in their miscarriage and destruction. Was it not in the thoughts of some lately amongst us, that their right hand had accomplished the work of the Lord, and that the end of it must be the satisfaction of their lusts? And hath not the Lord declared, that they have neither part nor lot in this matter? It was Salem, not self; Zion, not Babylon, or confusion, that lay at the bottom of the whole.

(2.) There is a relation of God unto this place. His will was known there, ver. 1. and his worship was established, ver. 2. And these also have their particular mention.

Observation. In the deliverance of his people, God hath a special regard to the honour of his ordinances. Why so great things for Salem? Why there his word is preached, whereby his will is known, and his name made great; there

his tabernacle is fixed, and his dwelling-place established; there he gives his presence in his worship and ordinances, wherein he is delighted. 'Because of thy temple at Jerusalem, shall kings bring presents to thee;' Psal. lxviii. 29. Here is the temple, Christ; and then the worship of Christ; for their sake it shall be done. When vengeance is recompensed upon an opposing people, it is the vengeance of the temple; Jer. l. 28. And it is a voice from thence that rendereth recompense to his enemies; Isa. lxvi. 6. The great work which the Lord at this day is accomplishing in the world, looks fully on this one thing. Wherefore is it that God shaketh the powers of this world, and causeth the towers to totter which they uphold? Is it not that the way of his worship may be vindicated from all their abominations, and vengeance taken upon them for their opposition thereunto? And there is no greater sign of God's care for a people, than when he shews a regard to his ordinances among that people. The defence he gives, is of the glory of the assemblies of mount Zion; Isa. iv. 5. When the ark departs, you may call the children Ichabod. The taking away of his candlestick, the removal of his glory from the temple, is an assured prologue to the utter ruin of a people.

And hath not the Lord had a special eye this way in the late deliverance? It is his promise, that he will purge the rebels from amongst his people. And he hath done it. Were there not children of Edom amongst them, who cried, Down with them, down with them even to the ground? Hath not God magnified his despised word above all his name? Was it not as an offscouring to many particular persons among them in the late murmuring for pre-eminence, against those whom the Lord hath chosen? Who I suppose have no other joy in their employment, than Moses had in his; who once desired the Lord to slay him, that he might be freed from his burden; only the will of the Lord, and the good of a poor thankless people swayed their hearts unto it. And were there here any more discriminating rods cast in before the Lord, to have that bud and spring which he owned, as Numb. xvii. than this one; Scripture, or no Scripture; solemn worship, or none at all? I speak only as to some particulars, and that I can upon my own experience. The Lord

give their hearts a free discovery of his thoughts in this business. Doubtless he hath had respect to his tabernacle and dwelling-place. For my part, they are to me as the Theban-shield; and notwithstanding all my pressures, I would labour to say as Mephibosheth, 'Let all go, since I see the king in peace.'

I might farther observe from both these things together, that among the people of God alone is the residence of his glorious presence. This song is held out from Zion: 'In his temple doth every one speak of his glory;' Psal. xxix. 9. 'Bless ye God in the congregation, the Lord from the fountain of Israel;' Psal. lxviii. 26. 'Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion;' Psal. lxv. 1. 'As a lame leg, and as a thorn in the hand,' ungraceful, painful; 'so is a parable in the mouth of fools;' Prov. xxvi. 7. 9. It is the saints who are bid to be joyful in the Lord, and 'the high praise of God must be in their mouths;' Psal. cxlix. 5, 6. They are high things, that beseem only those whom God doth magnify. If the Lord give us matter of praise, pray know from whom it will be acceptable, whose praises they are he delighteth to inhabit. If you have some defiled lust, the sunshine of mercies will exhale nothing but the offensive steam of carnal affections. The sacrifices of wicked hearts are an abomination to the Lord. If your fleshly affections work this day without the beatings of a pure heart, and the language of a pure lip, the Lord will reject your oblations. Would you have your praise as sweet to the Lord, as a mercy is to you; be assured that in Christ you are the Israel of God, and your prayers shall prevail, your praise shall be accepted.

2. The second particular, as I observed, is a special narration of the works of God, for which the whole is intended, ver. 3—6. And therein you have these two things: (1.) The place where these acts were wrought, and are remembered, 'there,' ver. 3. (2.) The acts themselves related, which refer, [1.] To God the worker, ver. 3. 'He brake;' [2.] To the persons on whom they were wrought, ver. 5, 6.

(1.) The place where these things were acted, and the monuments of them erected, that is, 'there;' there in Salem and Zion, Judah and Israel: there, not so much in those places, as with reference unto them.

Observation. All the mighty actings of God regard his

church, and there are the monuments and trophies of his victories against his enemies erected. To the first part of this, I spake before. A word for the latter. God decketh and maketh Zion glorious with the spoils of his adversaries. There the glory of Pharaoh and all his host, drowned in the Red sea, is dedicated; Exod. xv. There are the shields of all the mighty men in the host of Sennacherib, slain by an angel, hung up; Isa. xxxvii. 35, 36. There is the honour, the robes, the crown, and the reason of Nebuchadnezzar laid up for the glory of Zion, Dan. iv. 33, 34. himself being changed into a beast. There is all the pomp and glory of Herod deposited, Acts xii. 23. when, as a reward of his pride and persecution, he was devoured of worms. There is the glory of all persecutors, with the blood of Julian in a special manner, who threw it into the air, and cried, 'Vicisti Galilæe.' There Haman is visibly exalted upon the gallows by himself erected for the ruin of a prince of the people; Esth. vii. 10. There the peace and the joy of the church, their choice frame under the bloody massacres of the inhabitants of Zion, is set to show, for the glory of it. There are all the rochets of popish prelates, the crowns, and glory, and thrones of the kings of the earth, all set apart, as monuments and trophies of God's victories in Zion. There is a place reserved for the man of sin, and all the kings of the earth who have committed fornication with the mother of harlots, whose destruction sleepeth not. God will at length certainly glorify Salem with the arrow of the bow, the shield, the sword, and all spoils of its oppressors.

(2.) There is what he did describe, both immediately in the actions themselves, ver. 3. and with reference to the persons towards whom he so acted, ver. 5. Now because the former is fully contained in the latter, I shall not handle it apart, but descend immediately to the consideration of the words of my text, being a declaration of what the Lord hath done for his people in the day of their distress, with particular reference to the cause of that distress.

And here we shall look a little,

1. To the reading of the words: and

2. To their explication.

1. To the reading. The 'stout-hearted;' or, the 'strong in heart,' the 'mighty in heart:' so in the original. Men of stout,

stubborn, unpersuadable hearts and courage, whose epithet is, 'That they are far from righteousness;' Isa. xlvi. 12. The Septuagint have rendered it, *ἀσύνετοι τῇ καρδίᾳ*, 'the foolish in heart.' Stubborn-hearted men are foolish-hearted men: not to yield unto, is worse than not to understand, what is good. They 'are spoiled, אשתוללו have yielded themselves to the spoil:' so properly, and so rendered by most interpreters; which sense I shall follow. 'They have slept their sleep,' נמו 'dormitarunt,' 'they have slumbered their sleep.' What it is 'to slumber a sleep' we shall see afterward. The residue of the words are literally rendered, save only in the placing of the negation; for whereas we set it on the persons, 'none of the men;' in the original it is upon the act, 'have not found,' affirming concerning the persons, 'all the men of might have not,' that is, 'none of the men of might have;' a very frequent Hebraism, imitated by John; 1 Epist. iii. 15. *πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν*, 'Every man-slayer hath not life,' i. e. 'none hath.' And so you have the words: 'The stout of heart have yielded themselves to the spoils, they have slumbered their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands.'

2. The words thus read contain three general heads.

(1.) A twofold description of the enemies of Salem.

[1.] In respect of their internal affections: they were 'stout of heart,' men of high spirit, and haughty courage, 'cedere nescientes,' not knowing how to yield to any thing but the dictates of their own proud spirits.

[2.] In respect of their power for outward acting, 'Men of might,' strong of hand, as well as stout of heart. Courage without strength will but betray its possessor, and strength without courage is but 'inutile pondus,' a burdensome nothing; but when both meet, a stout heart and strong hands, who shall stand before them? Thus you have the enemies set out like Goliah with his spear and helmet, defying the host of the living God.

(2.) You have a twofold issue of God's providence, in dealing with them suitably to this their double qualification.

[1.] He opposeth himself to the stoutness of their hearts, and they 'yield themselves to the spoil.' Where observe, first, the act itself: they 'yield themselves.' Nothing in the world so contrary to a stout heart, as to yield itself. To

yield, is a thing of the greatest distance and contrariety to the principle of a stout heart, in the world. It is far more reconcileable to death, than yielding. But this God will effect. Secondly, The extent of this yielding: it was 'to the spoil.' This exceedingly heightens the mighty working of the Lord against them. Should they be brought to yield to reason, persuasion, and union, it were well; but that they should be so prevailed on as to yield to the spoil, that is, to the mercy of those against whom they rose and opposed themselves, this is 'digitus Dei.'

[2.] He opposeth himself to their actual might: they 'found not their hands.' Hands are the instruments of acting the heart's resolution. The strength and power of a man is in his hands; if they be gone, all his hope is gone. If a man's sword be taken from him, he will do what he can with his hands; but if his hands be gone, he may go to sleep for any disturbance he will work. For men not to find their hands, is not to have that power for the execution of their designs which formerly they had. In former days they had hands, power for doing great things; but now, when they should use them against Salem, they could not find them. And why so? God had taken them away; God took away their power, their strength departed from them. Samson found not his strength, when his locks were cut; though he thought to do as at other times, yet he was deceived and taken. When God takes away men's power, they go forth, and think to do as in former days; but when they come to exercise it, all is gone; their hands are laid out of the way, in allusion to one that seeketh.

(3.) There is the total issue of this whole dispensation, placed in the midst of both, as arising from both: 'they have slumbered their sleep.' When their hearts yielded, and their hands were lost, courage and power both taken away, what else should they do? Some take this for an expression of death, as it is sometimes used; Psal. xiii. 3. 'Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.' I rather conceive it to hold out that condition, which God threateneth to bring upon the enemies of his people, when he sends them 'a spirit of slumber;' Rom. xi. 8. Now in such a condition two things are eminent:

[1.] Its weakness. A condition of slumber and sleep is a

weak condition. A sleeping man is able to do nothing. Jael can destroy a drowsy Sisera.

[2.] Its vanity. Men in their sleep are apt to have foolish, vain fancies. This then is that which the Lord holds out concerning the enemies of his church, his people, his ways, when their hearts are gone, and their hands gone. They shall be brought to a condition of weakness in respect of others, they shall not be able to beat them: and of vanity in themselves, they shall feed themselves with vain thoughts, like the dream of a hungry man, Isa. xxix. 8. 'He dreameth, and behold he eateth; he waketh, and behold he is empty.' They please themselves for a little season with strong apprehensions of the accomplishment of their heart's lusts, and cobweb fancies; but the issue is shame and disappointment.

The words being opened, will yield us these three observations:

I. Men of stout hearts and strong hands, of courage and power, are often engaged against the Lord.

II. God suits the workings of providence for deliverance to the qualifications and actings of his opposers; their stout heart shall yield, their strong hands be lost.

III. Though men have courage, might, and success; yet when they engage themselves against the Lord, weakness and vanity shall be the issue thereof.

In the brief handling whereof I hope you shall find the word of God, and the works of God, exceedingly suited.

I. Men of courage, power, and success, of eminent qualifications, are oftentimes engaged against the Lord, and the ways of the Lord.

I shall multiply neither testimonies nor instances of this truth; for that were but to set up a candle in the sun: the experience of all ages has made it good. One or two places may suffice: Psal. lxviii. 30. 'Rebuke the company of spear men, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people.' There are not only 'calves of the people,' easily deluded, sottish men, but also multitudes of 'bulls,' heady, high-minded, bearing down all before them, throwing up all bounds and fences, laying all common to their lusts, not easily to be resisted; these also are amongst the adversaries of the ways of the Lord. The first open opposers of the

ways of God, were 'giants,' 'mighty men,' and 'men of renown;' Gen. vi. 4. At once 'two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, and men of renown,' joined themselves in rebellion against the Lord; Numb. xvi. 2. And that,

1. Because these very qualifications of a stout heart, strong hands, and former success are apt of themselves, if destitute of directing light and humbling grace, to puff up the spirits of men, and to engage them in ways of their own, contrary to the mind of the Lord. When men take advice of their stout hearts, strong hands, and former success, they are very evil counsellors. When Jeremiah advised the Jews from the Lord for their good, the proud men answered, they would not obey; Jer. xliii. 2. When Pharaoh is made stout for his ruin, he cries, 'Who is the Lord, that I should hear him?' Exod. v. 2. And for success, God makes the Assyrian the rod of his anger, sends him against the people of his wrath, with charge 'to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets;' Isa. x. 6. He goeth accordingly and prospereth; but when he hath so done, see what a conclusion he makes. He goes against Jerusalem, and cries, 'Let not your God deceive you. Have the gods of the nations delivered them;' and do you think so to be? Isa. xxxvii. 10. 12. From the success he had from God, he concluded the success he should have against him. Like those of late amongst ourselves, who having been partners with others in former successes, whilst they went upon the command of God, doubtless received in their stout hearts establishment, and strengthening to other undertakings, as if the God of the parliament could not help. Amaziah, king of Judah, wages war with Edom, and they are destroyed before him; 2 Kings xiv. 7. The war was of the Lord. Upon this he is lifted up, and causelessly provoketh Jehoash, king of Israel, ver. 8. against the mind and will of God. Jehoash sends him word, that if the thistle pride itself against the cedar, the wild beast will tread it down, ver. 9. But he had former success, and on he will go to his ruin. The stout-hearted men (for a delivery from whose fury and folly, we desire this day to lift up the name of the Lord) having received help and assistance against Edom, will needs lift up the thistle against the cedar, act

out of their own sphere, turn subjection into dominion, to their shame and sorrow. But it were better, their hearts should be filled with sorrow than the nation, and especially the people of God in the nation, with blood and confusion, ending in bondage and tyranny. And this is the first account of it, why men of such qualifications, are engaged against the Lord. The qualifications themselves do set up for it, if destitute of divine light and humbling grace. Such men will run upon God, and the thick bosses of his buckler.

2. God will have it so, that the greater may be his glory in the powerful protection and defence of his own, with the destruction, disappointment, and ruin, of their enemies. If his enemies were all sottish, weak, foolish, childish, until he makes them so, where would be the praise of his great name? When would there be 'Nodus Deo vindice dignus,' work worthy of the appearance of the Most High? But when there is a great mountain before Zerubbabel, Zech. iv. 7. a high, haughty, oppressing empire, to level that to a plain is glorious. When God will get himself a name, he raises up, not a poor, effeminate Sardanapalus, a poor sensual, hypocritical wretch, as some have been, the Lord will not make an open contest by such a one (such as some of our sore oppressors have been), but he will raise up a Pharaoh, a crooked Leviathan, a stout-hearted, cunning-headed, strong-handed oppressor; and he tells him, such a one as he, 'for this very cause have I raised thee up, to shew in thee my power, and that my name may be declared in all the earth;' Exod. ix. 16. Thou art a fit subject, saith he, for me to exalt my glory in thy ruin. The beast is to make war with the Lamb; and he shall not do it alone, God will give him in assistance. And who shall these be? Women, and children, and weak ones? No; he will put it into the heart of the kings of the earth 'to give their power and strength to the beast,' Rev. xvii. 17. to break them in pieces. This will be glory indeed. All the opposers which formerly have risen, or at least most of them, have had the power to that height, as they have been exceedingly above all outwardly appearing means of being resisted. The breaking of the old monarchies, and of papal power, is a work meet for the Lord. And in this shall mainly consist the promised glory of the church of Christ in after

days, whose morning star I doubt not, is now upon us; the Lord will more immediately and visibly break the high, stout, haughty ones of the earth, for the sake of his people, than in former times. Look upon all the glorious things that are spoken concerning Zion in the latter days, and you shall find them all interwoven with this still, 'the shaking of heaven, the casting down of thrones and dominions, and mighty ones.' I mention this, because indeed I look upon this late mercy, as the after-drops of a former refreshing shower, as an appendix of good-will, for the confirming the former work which God had wrought. 'Though,' saith he, 'ye have lain among the pots,' have been in a poor, defiled condition, a condition of bondage; 'yet ye shall be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold,' ye shall be made exceeding glorious. But how, or when shall this be? Why, 'when the Almighty scattereth kings for her sake, then shall she be as white as snow in Salmon;' Psal. lxviii. 13, 14. When God by his almighty power takes away so great opposers, then glory and beauty shall arise upon you. And this in some degree lies also at the bottom of the late dispensation of providence. Men's hearts were full of fear of a storm; yea, a storm was necessary, that some evidence might be given of the Lord's continuing his presence amongst you; that if hereafter we be forsaken, it may appear that it was for our own unbelief, unthankfulness, and folly, and not for doing the work of the Lord. Now, how was this expected? Why, this poor people, or that, unacquainted with the things of their peace, will rise and make opposition: no, saith the Lord, you shall not have so easy a trial; you shall have men of stout hearts, and strong hands, with many former successes on their shoulders; that when deliverance is given in, my name may be glorious indeed.

Use 1. Be not moved at the most formidable enemies that may arise against you in the ways of God. 'It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind;' Isa. vii. 2. When strong combinations arise, how apt are we to shake and tremble before them; especially when they have some strangeness, as well as strength? That Syria

should come against Judah is no wonder. But what, I pray, makes Ephraim too, their brother and fellow in former afflictions? Besides, Syria and Ephraim were always at a mortal difference among themselves. But they who agree in nothing else, usually consent in opposition to the ways of God. Then you shall have Edom, Ammon, Amalek, and Ashur altogether of one mind; Psal. lxxxiii. 6—8. And the kings of the west, that perpetually devour one another, yet have one mind in exalting the beast, and opposing the Lamb; Rev. xvii. 14. As in our late troubles, there was a concurrence not only in the main of Syria and Ephraim, the two grand extremes, but also of innumerable particular fancies and designs; that if a man should have met them, like him in the fable, the lion, the ass, and the fox, he could not but wonder, 'Quo iter una facerent,' whither they were travelling together. But I say, when such combinations are made, how apt are we to shake and tremble? They are stout men, valiant men, and perhaps Ahithophel is with them. Why, if they were not such, I pray, how should the Lord have any praise in the close of the dispensation? We would be delivered, but we care not that God should be glorified. If God's glory were dear to us, we should not care how high opposition did arise. Precious faith, where art thou fled? Had we but some few grains of it, we might see the rising of the greatest mountains to be but a means to make the name of God glorious, by removing them into the midst of the sea. Hath it not been thus in the days of old? The Lord humble us for our unbelief.

Use 2. Let men to whom the Lord hath given stout hearts, strong hands, and great success, watch carefully over their own spirits, lest they be led aside into any way against the mind of God. Great endowments are ofttimes great temptations. 'The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the rock, whose habitation is on high, that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?' Obad. ver. 3. Was it not the ruin of Amaziah, of whom notwithstanding it was said, 'he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord?' 2 Chron. xxv. 2. He who is heightened against the king of terrors, if he hath not humility, one of the chief of graces, will quickly choose himself paths of his own. Alas! poor creatures, if hearts and

hands be, and God be not, what will it avail? But of this afterward. I now proceed to the second observation.

II. God suits the workings and actings of providence for deliverance to the qualifications of the opposers.

Are they stout hearts? They shall be made to yield themselves. Are they men of might? They shall lose their power; they shall not find their hands. To this I shall speak very little. This is the cutting off of Adonibezek's toes and thumbs. God countermines them in their actings, and blows them up in their own mine. 'In the thing wherein they deal proudly, he is above them;' Exod. xviii. 11. They shall not soar so high on the wings of their pride, but that still they shall find God uppermost. When they take counsel, and think to carry it by their advices, God saith, 'I am wise also, and will bring evil;' Isa. xxxi. 2. When they think to carry it by a high hand, his strength shall appear against them. When Herod owns the blasphemy of being called a god, he shall rot and be eaten of worms; Acts xii. 23. Pharaoh cries, 'Come on, let us deal wisely against Israel;' Exod. i. 10. He of all men shall play the fool, for his own ruin, and the ruin of his people; Exod. xiv. 27, 28. If Sennacherib boasts of his mighty host, be sure he shall not find his hands. How evidently hath the Lord thus carried on his providence in the late dispensation? Were not many of the headless, heady undertakers, 'robusti animo,' mighty of heart? And were they not forced to yield themselves? Yea, to 'yield themselves to the spoil?' Were they not deep in their plotting? Doubtless they, or their seducers, had digged deep to lay their design; though of the generality of them, it cannot be said, as was of Cæsar and his companions, 'accessere sobrii ad perdendum rempublicam.' They were brought to act things in very folly and confusion. They were great men of might; whence is it, they made no more opposition? The Lord laid their hands out of the way. Many reasons might be given of this, but I must pass to the last point.

III. Though men have courage, might, and former successes to accompany them, yet, when they engage themselves against the Lord, or any way of his, vanity, weakness, and disappointment will be the issue thereof.

'Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with you?' saith the Lord; Ezek.

xxii. 14. 'Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth; woe unto him that contendeth with his Maker;' Isa. xlv. 9. 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?' Job ix. 4. 'The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought, but the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; he maketh the devices of the people of none effect;' Psal. xxxiii. 10, 11. Whoever riseth up without him, or against him, shall fall and come to nothing. This is a plain point, that we suppose ourselves exceedingly well versed in. But he who searcheth our spirits, and is acquainted with our inward parts, knows how great is our unbelief in this very thing. And therefore, in tender condescension, he hath carefully provided for our support herein. A man would think one word once spoken were enough to convince and persuade the whole world of this truth; but the Lord knows, there must be line upon line, here a little and there a little, to give his own people any establishment herein. And therefore it is, that in so many places in his word he hath asserted and affirmed this one thing, viz. Let men be never so strong, powerful, and successful, if once they engage against him, they are utterly destroyed, unless he pluck them out of the snare. 'Associate yourselves,' &c. Isa. viii. 9.

But you will say, Engage against the Lord! That is true; whoever engageth against him, shall surely fall. But who is so mad as to do so? Very Rabshakeh himself affirms that he came not up to Jerusalem without the Lord, but that the Lord sent him to go up against the land to destroy it; Isa. xxxvi. 10. It is true he said so: and by this observation you have an answer to the Scripture. For though he said so, he lied before the Lord, and belied the Lord; his undertaking was against the Lord, and against his mind, as the sequel fully manifested. Many suppose they engage for God, when they engage against him. To engage against the Lord, is to engage against his mind and will. To undertake without the will of God, is enough to be the ruin of the best and stoutest, as we see in the case of Josiah. But to engage against him, who can do it, and stand when he is provoked? This then is that which neither stout hearts nor strong hands shall ever be able to go through withal. For instance; to engage against that authority which God will

own and defend, is successlessly to engage against the Lord. Now because these are the days wherein the Lord will shake heaven and earth, beat the nations with a rod of iron, breaking much of the power of the world; it may be asked by some, How it shall be known, that any authority is such as the Lord will not destroy and overturn, but own it as a way of his own? I answer; to omit the rule of reason, law, and common established principles amongst men, all which give a great light unto the rule of walking in this case; I shall give you six scriptural significations 'a posteriori' of such an authority, as the Lord will make as a brazen wall, or a rock in the sea, against which the waves dash with noise and fury, but are themselves broken to pieces.

1. If it be such as the Lord hath honoured with success and protection in great, hazardous and difficult undertakings for himself. Thus was it with Moses. Never had a leader of a people more murmurings, revilings, and rebellions against him. The story is obvious unto all. He was envied, hated, reproached of all sorts, from the princes of the congregation to the mixed multitude. But Moses had travelled through the sea and the desert with the Lord, and was encompassed with success and protection; and therefore, all attempts against him shall be birthless and fruitless. This is one; but it will never do alone, unless conjoined with those that follow.

2. If the persons enjoying that authority abide to act for God, and not for themselves, after such success and protection. Saul began to act for God, and he vexed all his enemies which way soever he turned himself. But afterward turning to himself, God left him to himself. Cyrus, how honoured, how anointed was he for his great undertaking against Babylon! But afterward pursuing his own ambition, he was requited with blood, for the blood he sought. The Lord is with them that are with him, and whilst they are so. The establishment of the house of Saul is far from the Lord: for 'those that honour him, he will honour; and they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed;' 1 Sam. ii. 30. There is no more certain sign in the world of persons devoted to ruin, or at least to their being divested of their authority, than that having followed God for a season in their enjoyment of success and protection, they turn aside

to pursue their own ends, like Jehu. I could give you an example of this, as yet not much above half a year old. But when men undertake with the Lord, and for him, and having known his assistance therein, shall continue to lay out themselves in his ways; the Lord will then build them a house like David, which shall not be prevailed against.

Here I must give one caution by the way; that I am very far from countenancing any to move against the just and righteous authority, who discern not these things: the Lord forbid. Let men look to the rule of their obedience, which I have nothing to do withal at this time. I only describe such, as unto whom, if any dare to make opposition in an ordinary dispensation of providence, it will prove fruitless and vain.

3. The third thing is, that they subject their power to the power of the Lord Christ, who is Lord of lords, and King of kings. The psalmist tells the rulers of the earth, that the reason of their spoiling is, that they do not 'kiss the Son,' Psal. ii. 12. or yield unfeigned obedience to the mighty King, whom God hath set on his holy hill. God hath promised that he will give in the service of kings and nations to Christ in his kingdom, and therein shall be their security. When God puts it into the hearts of rulers, to rule according to the interest of Christ and his gospel, and to seek the advancement of his sceptre, they shall surely be as a fenced wall. I cannot stay to shew, what this interest of Christ is. In a word, it is the ordering, framing, carrying on of affairs, as is most conducible to the unravelling and destruction of the mystery of iniquity.

4. If they are supported by the prayer of a chosen people who seek their welfare, not for their own interest and advantage, but for the advantage of the gospel, and the ways of Christ by them asserted. If God's own people pray for them in authority, that under them they may enjoy some share of their own, and obtain some ends suited to any carnal interest of theirs, God will reject those prayers. But when they seek their welfare, because it is discovered to them, that in their peace the gospel shall have peace and prosperity; surely the Lord will not cast out their prayers, nor shame the face of his poor supplicants.

5. If in sincerity, and with courage and zeal, they fulfil

the work of their magistracy, in the administration of righteous judgment; especially in those great and unusual acts of justice, in breaking the jaws of the wicked and terrible, and delivering the spoil out of the teeth of the mighty; Job xxix. 17. Innumerable are the demonstrations of God's owning such persons.

6. If they have not the qualifications of that power, which in these latter days God hath promised to destroy. Now these are two; I will but name them unto you. First, Drinking the cup of fornication that is in the hand of the harlot, i. e. practising any false worship and forms invented besides the word. Secondly, Giving their power to the beast, or engaging in any ways of persecution against any of the ways of God, or his saints in those ways. That the Lord is about to shake, break, and destroy all such powers as these, I did not long since, by his assistance, here demonstrate.

And so have I completed my instances that they who engage against such an authority as is attended with these qualifications, engage against the Lord. I could also give other instances in other ways and institutions of God; but I chose these as most accommodated to the season.

If now I should tell you, that notwithstanding all clamours to the contrary, these things for the main are found in your assemblies, thousands in the world would, yet I hope your own consciences would not, return the lie for so saying. But yet, though the Lord seems to bear witness to some integrity in his late dispensations, I shall only pray, that what is wanting may be supplied; that you may never want the like protection, in the like distress.

Come we now briefly to the reasons why those who oppose such authority shall not succeed. And it were an easy labour to multiply reasons hereof. The sovereignty, the power, all the attributes of God would furnish us with arguments: I shall omit them all; only touch upon two, that are couched in the text.

They shall have no better issue, because, (1.) The Lord will take away their stout hearts, whereby they are supported; (2.) He will take away their strong hands, whereby they are confirmed: and when hearts and hands are gone, they also are gone.

(1.) He will take away their stout hearts, that they shall

no more be able to carry them out to any success in their great undertakings. He will break that wheel at the very fountain, that it shall no more be the spring of their proceedings.

Now this the Lord usually doth, one or more of these four ways: [1.] He fills them with fury and madness; so taking away their order. [2.] He fills them with folly and giddiness; so taking away their counsel. [3.] He fills them with terror and amazement; so depriving them of their courage. Or, [4.] with contrition and humility; so changing their spirits.

[1.] He fills them with fury and madness, taking away their order, which is the tie and cement of all societies in all undertakings. 'Though all the people of the earth,' saith the Lord, 'be gathered together against Jerusalem,' they shall not prosper. And why so? 'I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness;' Zech. xii. 4. Madmen have often great strength, and with it great fury: but know not how to use it, except to their own ruin. When they think to do the greatest mischief, they cut and gash themselves. Thus the Lord threateneth those, who in outward profession are his own people, when they walk contrary to him. 'The Lord shall smite thee with madness of heart, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways;' Deut. xxviii. 28, 29. Because smitten with madness, therefore they shall not prosper. This is that untameable fury, whereby men are carried out to sinful, destructive enterprises, as the horse rushes into the battle. A judgment which some men vocally, as well as actually, at this day proclaim to be upon their spirits. They cry their blood boils, and their hearts rage for revenge; reviling those in authority whereby to foment; Acts xix. Hence they stir up men for the engaging in such designs, as if accomplished, in the judgment of all men not mad like themselves, would certainly prove ruinous to themselves and others. And in this frame they delight, of it they boast, not once considering that it is a badge and character of men, whom God will disappoint and destroy in their proceedings; it being nothing but the working of that evil spirit, which came upon Saul, stirring him up to rage and fury, when once the meek, calming Spirit of the Lord, departed from him.

[2.] He will fill them with folly and giddiness; so taking

away their counsel. Foolish and giddy undertakers do but conceive chaff, and bring forth stubble. 'The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit;' Isa. xix. 13, 14. This he calls taking away the spirit of Egypt, and destroying the counsel thereof, ver. 3. There is no means of ruin, destruction, and disappointment, that God doth more frequently threaten than this: he will take wisdom from the wise, and then pour contempt upon the spirit of princes: when to their madness he adds blindness; to their fury, folly; to their rage, giddiness; what can be the issue but such as is expressed: 'They shall stagger like a drunken man in his vomit?' Stand before him, and he'll pour his filth upon you; let him alone, and he and it will quickly tumble to the ground. What, I pray, can be expected from mad, blind, furious, foolish, raging, giddy men? Should a man use these expressions of any, it would be said he railed; yet God hath spoken it that all undertakers against him shall be so and no otherwise. Now hence ariseth upon the spirits of such men a twofold effect: First, They shall not be able to advise rationally against others. Nor, secondly, shall they be able to receive suitable advice from others: they shall be able neither to make out counsel to support them in the way wherein they are, nor to take in counsel for their reducing to better paths. If this were not evident in the late dispensation of the Lord towards poor creatures, setting up themselves against the Lord, then never did any providence speak plain in any latter age.

[3.] He will fill them with fear and amazement; so taking away their courage. This God caused to fall upon a whole host at one time; that without seeing an enemy, they ran and fled, and lost all they had, and the spoil; 2 Kings vii. 6, 7. And he threatens that in such a condition, he will make men like women, they shall be afraid and fear; Isa. xix. 16. Yea, this is the way of God's usual dealing; first, he overcomes the spirit of his enemies, and then their armies or force; and the Lord is magnified therein, as is fully set out, Exod. xv. 14—16. The hearts and spirits of men are all in the hand of God; he can pluck them in, or let them

out, as seems good unto him; make him that was mighty one day, the next day to be of no power; what is left of fury, folly shall devour; and what is left of folly, fear shall consume; and the purpose of the Lord shall be established.

[4.] If he have any favour for them, and so will not proceed in these ways of revenge against them, which would end in their speedy ruin; he will give them contrition and humility, so changing them. What a clear testimony of this did he give in the business of Jacob and Esau: Esau resolves and threatens his death upon the first opportunity, Gen. xxvii. 41. an opportunity is put into his hands by Jacob's return into Canaan, chap. xxxii. means of revenge he is ready furnished withal, and comes out accordingly with a band of cut-throats for the purpose, in the same chapter. What should any man now rationally expect, but that poor Jacob must certainly be ruined, and the mother slain with the children? In an instant the Lord toucheth the heart of Esau, and all his menaces of revenge issued in tears and expressions of love and joy; chap. xxxiii. 4. It is to be rejoiced in that the stout hearts of some men are changed upon their disappointment, and the issue of the mercy is no loss to you, to the nation, and themselves therein: though truly to them it had been an argument of greater love, had the Lord graciously bent their spirits unto it before. But by his infinite wisdom he hath accomplished his holy will.

Now in one, more, or all of these ways, will the Lord proceed with the mighty of heart, that set up themselves against him, until he take away their hearts, and make them useless; that either willingly, or unwillingly, 'they shall yield themselves' even 'to the spoil.'

(2.) He will not only take away their hearts, but also their hands; he will not only dispirit them, but he will also disarm them; he will take not only wisdom from their hearts, but the wheels from their chariots. He is the God of the power of men, as well as of the spirits of men. Will he continue power and strength unto men to use it against him that gives it?

Use 1. To discover the ground of God's late dispensation, in taking away the hearts from the stout, and hands from the mighty, bringing them into a condition of weakness and vanity. Their undertakings were against the Lord, and their

hearts could not endure, neither could their hands be strong.

I shall give some instances in their undertaking against the Lord.

(1.) In their declared enmity to the ministry of the gospel: not to the persons of ministers, because engaged in some faction in the state; wherein perhaps many may be opposed, and that from the Lord: nor yet because of their persuasion for the administration of ordinances, after this or that form; which often ariseth to very great animosities: the Lord pardon them unto his people: but because in general they do administer ordinances. Now certainly there is so much of God in that administration, that if they be opposed, not for other causes, or upon other pretences, but 'eo nomine,' as administrators of ordinances, that opposition is made to God himself. It was part of the end of Christ's ascension, that he might bestow those gifts upon them, which they do enjoy; Eph. iv. 8. And shall the fury of men, make the work of God, the purchase of Christ, of none effect? Doubtless in this respect, God will make as many as are sincere, 'a fenced brazen wall;' Jer. xv. 20. Men may batter their hands, and beat out their brains against them; but they shall not prevail. It is true, as many of them are pleased in these days to engage themselves in several parties; so, if they do close and act with them that are pernicious to the commonwealth, all inconvenience that lighteth upon them, is from themselves; their profession gives them no sanctuary from opposition: but when they are envied, 'eo nomine,' as administrators of ordinances, not in such or such a way, but as ordinances; shall not the Lord plead for this thing? Now that this was aimed at by some, I suppose none can doubt. The Lord open the eyes of them who in this deliverance have received deliverance, but will not see it. I fear some men had almost rather perish, than be delivered not in their own way. Envy in some men will outbalance safety. Alas! we are proud beggars, when we will refuse the mercy of God, if we may not appoint the hand whereby it shall be bestowed.

(2.) Against the spiritual ordinances of God themselves. These are the carved work, which they aimed to break down with their axes and hammers. Christ hath said, 'I will build

my church.' Their voice was, Down with it, down with it even to the ground. Poor creatures! they dashed themselves against the rock. Is this a time, think you, to engage against all ordinances, when the Lord Jesus is joining battle with all the world for their abuse of them? and is vindicating them in order to more purity, beauty, lustre, power, efficacy, and peace, than ever yet he adorned them withal? You were not wise, poor souls, to discern the seasons. What! no time to pluck down, but when Christ himself is building? Ah! turn your weapons against Babylon; it will prove far the more thriving warfare. Let Zion alone, if but for your own sakes. Jerusalem will prove a burdensome stone to all that take her up. You have received more loss in a week of days from Christ in this nation, than you would have done in a week of years from antichrist in another. God will make them that shall go for Ireland, sensible of this truth. See Psal. xlviii. 12—14.

(3.) Principally and immediately against magistracy; if not in the abstract, yet openly as established in the hands of those, whom the Lord hath owned in the darkest day that ever this nation saw. It is the hope of my soul, that the Lord hath borne witness, that they have the sixfold qualification before mentioned. And why would they have at once destroyed the parliament, and their own commander? Look upon the end of their common workmen: was it not that every one might have enjoyed their lust for a season? Of the more crafty: was it not to get themselves power, to attempt their folly, and execute their fury? Look upon the end of the work: was it not to have wrapt us in confusion for a few months, and then to have given us up to the revengeful will of enraged enemies? So that truly there is but one thing wonderful to me in all this business, that God should take away the hearts and hands of these men in this enterprise, and that is, that he should do it in mercy for such an unthankful, unworthy, unbelieving people as we are. In this is he for ever to be admired and blessed. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and the horses have failed.

Use 2. If this be the cause why 'they have slumbered their sleep;' be instructed, ye that are rulers of this nation, in the ways of peace, protection, and safety: be in the ways of God, and do the things of God, and no weapon that is

formed against you shall ever prosper. Many protections and deliverances you have had in your actings for him. Hath he not deserved at your hands to be trusted and feared all your days, with all your power? As my heart hath always been towards the governors in Israel, who willingly offered themselves among the people; so truly my heart never more trembled over them, than now. Oh! where shall we find hearts fit to receive so many mercies, as have been given into our bosoms? Oh! where shall we have hearts large enough to receive all these mercies? The oil ceased when the vessel would hold no more. All my hope and confidence is, that God will work for his name's sake. I could exhort you to sundry particulars, and lay down several paths of God, walking wherein you shall be sure to find peace and safety; as especially that you would regard that which God hath honoured, whereunto the opposition which he had resolved to make void, was made.

Use 3. You that are men of courage, and might, and success, stout of heart, and strong of hand, be watchful over yourselves, lest you should in any thing be engaged against the Lord. The ways of the Lord are your locks, step but out of them, they will be cut, and you will become like other men, and be made a prey and a mocking to the uncircumcised that are round about. These eminencies you have from God, are eminent temptations to undertakings against God, if not seasoned with grace and watchfulness. Ah! how many baits have Satan and the world suited to these qualifications. Samson shook himself, and went out, saying, 'I will do as at other times; but he knew not that the Lord was departed from him.' You may think when you are walking in paths of your own, that you will do as at other times; but if your strength be departed away, what will be the end?

Use 4. Our last use should be of instruction in respect of God, that you may see, both what he can do, and trust him; and consider what he hath done, and bless him. For the first; weapons of all sorts, men of all sorts, judgments of all sorts, are at his command and disposal: see it in this psalm. And for what he hath done; if there be any virtue in the presence of Christ in his ordinances; if any worth in the gospel; if any sweetness in carrying on the work of Christ's revenge against Babylon; if any happiness in the establish-

ment of the peace and liberty of a poor nation, purchased with so much blood, and so long a contest; if any content in the disappointment of the predations and threats of God's enemies, and his people's; if any refreshment to our bowels, that our necks are yet kept from the yoke of lawless lust, fury, and tyranny; if any sweetness in a hope that a poor, distressed handful in Ireland may yet be relieved; if any joy that God hath given yet another testimony of his presence amongst us; if it be any way valuable, that the instruments of our deliverance be not made the scorned object of men's revengeful violence; if any happiness, that the authority under which we enjoy all these mercies, is not swallowed up: is it not all in the womb of this deliverance? And who is he that hath given it into our bosom?

SERMON XXX.

THE

SIN AND JUDGMENT OF SPIRITUAL BARRENNESS.

But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.—EZEK. xlvii. 11.

THIS prophecy contains a vision of the glorious, holy, gospel state of the church under the representation of a most glorious temple, incomparably excelling that built of old by Solomon; an exposition whereof we have, 2 Cor. iii. 6—8. &c.

The beginning of this chapter sets out the way and means of the calling and gathering of gospel churches, whose worship is to be so glorious; and this is under a vision of 'waters issuing out of the sanctuary,' to heal and quicken all places to which they came.

By the waters here mentioned is the preaching of the gospel intended. And we may observe of them, first, Their rise: which was from the sanctuary. Secondly, Their progress: they increased until they became a river that none could pass over. Thirdly, Their effects or efficacy: they healed all waters where they came, and quickened, or caused to live, the fishes that were in them.

I must not long insist on these particulars.

First, The house or temple from whence these waters issue, may be taken two ways.

1. Mystically, to denote only the presence of God. God dwelt in his temple, thence come these waters, from his presence. He sends out the word of the gospel for the conversion and healing of the nations; Psal. cx. 2. Or,

2. Figuratively, and that either for the place where the temple of old stood, that is, Jerusalem, as the preaching of the gospel was to go forth from Jerusalem, and the sound of it from thence to proceed unto all the world, as Isa. xli. 27.

lii. 7. Acts i. 4. 8. or, for the church of Christ and his apostles, the first glorious, spiritual temple unto God, whence these waters issued.

Secondly, Their progress, which is described by degrees, it being at first small, few men preaching it, and to a few; but afterward increasing, until it filled the whole earth.

Thirdly, The effects mentioned or ascribed unto these waters are two, quickening, and healing; which I shall not in general speak farther unto, because I shall do it in the opening of my text.

In the words of the text you have the state and condition of those places, whither the waters of the sanctuary do come, and the effects before described unto them, are not produced. For so the words are to be read: 'That shall not be healed.'

We have here a description of some lands or places whereunto the holy waters do come. First, They are 'miry and marshy places.' Secondly, The event of the waters coming to them; they 'are not healed.' Thirdly, The consequent of that event; they 'are given unto salt.'

I shall in a few words lay open the allegory, or parable unto you.

First, By the waters of the sanctuary, I told you, is meant the preaching of the gospel, that quickening and healing word which the Lord sends out to gather his church unto himself all the world over; to call his saints to that glorious, gospel, spiritual worship, which is here described in this vision of a temple.

Secondly, The 'miry and marshy places,' where these waters come, are such, where persons cleave inseparably and incurably to their lusts and sins, so that they are not healed by the word. The healing word of the gospel comes, but they receive it not; the water flows over them, they drink it not in, are not quickened, nor healed by it.

Thirdly, To be 'given unto salt,' is to be left unto barrenness; Deut. xxix. 23. Judg. ix. 45. Jer. xvii. 6.

The figurative sense of the passage thus explained, will afford us the following observations.

Observation I. God is pleased oftentimes to send the waters of the sanctuary to 'miry and marshy places,' that 'shall never be healed' by them, nor made fruitful. Or,

God in his infinite wisdom is pleased to send the preaching of the word unto some places, wherein it shall not put forth its quickening and sanctifying power and virtue, upon the souls of them that hear it.

II. All places in the world are barren, unsound and unhealthy, before the coming of the waters of the sanctuary upon them. Or, the souls of all men are spiritually dead and full of woful distempers, until they are quickened and healed by the dispensation of the gospel. The word must come and heal them.

III. The waters of the sanctuary are healing waters. Or, the word of the gospel is in its own nature a quickening, healing, sanctifying, saving word, to them who receive it.

IV. Where the waters of the sanctuary come, and the land is not healed, that land is given up of the Lord to salt or barrenness for ever. Or, where the word of the gospel is, by the infinitely wise disposal of God, preached unto a place, or persons, and they receive it not, so as to have their sinful distempers healed by it, they are usually after a season, given up by the righteous judgment of God unto barrenness, and everlasting ruin.

It is this last proposition, as that which is the direct design and scope of the place, that I intend to insist principally upon. But yet I shall speak somewhat to the former.

I. God is pleased oftentimes in his infinite wisdom to send the preaching of the word unto some places, wherein it shall not put forth its quickening and sanctifying power and virtue, upon the souls of them that hear it.

The whole Scripture, and whole story of the providence of God, in sending the gospel abroad in the world, bears witness to this truth. It was his way from the foundation of the world, and continueth to this very day. Hence was that complaint of the prophet, Isa. liii. 1. 'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' The gospel is preached to them that believe not the report thereof. And, chap. xlix. 4. 'Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought.' But we need no greater instance, nor any other than that of our Saviour; who spent the greatest part of his ministry in preaching to them who were never healed, never converted,

nor sanctified by his word. That account he gives of his work, Matt. xi. 21—24. 'Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!' &c.

Now though there be no searching into the depths of the counsels of God; yet there appear many reasons, wherein his wisdom in this dispensation doth shine forth. As,

1. He doth it principally, because in those places where the word is rejected by the generality of the people; yet there may be some secret poor souls belonging to the election of grace, whom God will have gathered, and called home to himself. So for their sakes, though in the world they are taken no notice of, the word shall be preached unto multitudes; Amos ix. 9. 'I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.' The grains of Israel must be preserved through all the nations of the earth, that not one grain may be lost. Thus Paul preaches the gospel at Philippi; Acts xvi. 12, 13. And what entertainment meets it withal? He and his companions are taken, and beaten, and cast into prison, sore hurt, and wounded; ver. 22, 23. Why then was it that the gospel must be preached there? Why, there was a stranger come to that town, a poor woman, one Lydia, that dwelt at Thyatira, and she was to be converted, and brought home to God; ver. 14. So at Athens, chap. xvii. 34. And the apostle affirms, that he 'endured all things for the elect's sake;' 2 Tim. ii. 10. Here and there a poor despised person is designed to be called.

2. God doth it for a testimony against them that receive it not, and to leave them inexcusable at the last day; Mark vi. 11. 'Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them.' The word is to be preached, and witness, as it were, is to be taken upon it, that it was preached, that men may be left without excuse at the last day. As our Saviour pleads concerning his own preaching to the Pharisees, John xv. 22. 'Had I not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin.' God will cause men to be without excuse, by that tender of mercy which is made unto them

in the gospel. It shall be for a testimony against them at the last day.

Use. Let not men boast themselves in the outward enjoyment of the word, nor rest themselves in it. It were well indeed if all were believers to whom the word is preached; if all lands were healed, where the waters of the sanctuary come. But the Holy Ghost tells us, they are not so, Heb. iv. 2. 'The word preached did not profit them.' 'Capernaum was exalted unto heaven,' in the use of means, but 'brought down to hell,' for the neglect of them. Let men look to themselves; God hath various ends in sending the gospel. The Lord knows what will be the end of England's enjoying the gospel so long as it hath done. Sad symptoms appear of a tremendous issue. But I shall speak of this afterward.

II. The souls of all men are spiritually dead, and full of woful distempers, until they are quickened and healed by the dispensation of the gospel.

The waters of the sanctuary must come to quicken them, and heal them. They are distempered therefore, and wofully disordered, before the coming of these waters. So the apostle informs us, Tit. iii. 3—5. 'For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' Before the gospel grace comes to heal and cleanse them, this is the state and condition of men, as it is more largely described by the apostle, Rom. i. 18. to the end.

I shall not stay to mention all the particular distempers that rage in some, and that rule and reign in all, before the coming of the gospel; as darkness, blindness, ignorance, worldly-mindedness, sensuality, hatred of God, envy and malice, which are fixed in the souls of men by presumption, and self-righteousness. There is nothing in them of spiritual life or holiness, of purity or zeal, nothing that is acceptable or pleasing unto God. But to set forth this to the utmost were to describe the whole natural condition of men,

which is not my present work, and therefore I shall not farther insist on it.

III. The word of the gospel is in its own nature, a quickening, healing, sanctifying, saving word to them who receive it.

They bring Christ along with them, the great physician of souls, who alone is able to cure a sin-sick soul. They bring mercy with them to pardon sinners; that 'the inhabitants of the land may no more say, they are sick, having their sins forgiven them;' Isa. xxxiii. 24. They bring grace with them to cure all the distempers of lusts; Isa. xi. 5—7. Tit. ii. 11, 12.

These things I have only touched upon, and proceed now to the fourth observation, on which I chiefly proposed to insist.

IV. Where the waters of the sanctuary come, and the land is not healed, that land is given up of the Lord, to salt and barrenness for ever. Or, where the word of the gospel is preached unto a place or persons, and they receive it not, so as to have their sinful distempers healed by it, they are given up by the righteous judgment of God unto barrenness and everlasting ruin.

To clear this proposition, I shall shew, 1. What I mean by the coming of the waters of the sanctuary, or the preaching of the gospel to a place, or persons; 2. What by healing their sinful distempers; 3. What by being given up to barrenness and ruin.

1. By the coming of the healing waters of the sanctuary, I intend not the occasional preaching of a sermon, although this be sufficient to justify God in the rejection of any person or people. In the first preaching of the gospel, the refusal of one sermon lost many their souls unto all eternity. When the Lord Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the tidings of everlasting peace, he commanded them to pass through the towns, cities, and villages, and to offer them peace and mercy in the word of truth; which if they received not, they were to shake off the dust of their feet against them; Matt. x. 12—15. Luke x. 8. But, O, the unspeakable patience of Christ to many in the world, where the word is continued ofttimes for a very long season, and the salvation tendered therein despised! But this is that

which I intend, as the rule of the dispensation mentioned: namely, when God by his providence, doth cause the word to be preached for some continuance, and to the revelation of his whole counsel; as Paul affirmed himself to have done at Ephesus, Acts xx. 27. where he had abode above a year.

Nor do I mean any waters, but the waters of the sanctuary; not any preaching, but the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which Paul affirms to be his work, Eph. iii. 8. All waters are not the waters of the sanctuary; all preaching is not the preaching of the sanctuary. There is preaching in the world, wherein God and the souls of men are no more concerned, than in an oration of an ancient heathen. Many undertake to be preachers, who never 'stood in the counsel of God,' as he complains, Jer. xxiii. 22. who never received of the Spirit of Christ, nor knew his mind, blind leaders of the blind. The children of Zion are promised under the gospel, that they shall be all taught of God. And we have men undertaking to be teachers of them, who never learned any thing of Christ. A wicked generation of soul-murderers, for which cursed work they every day invent new engines, whom the Lord's soul abhors. See their condition and portion, Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4, &c. I mean therefore a dispensation of the word according to the mind of Christ, the due unfolding of the mystery of the gospel. This is the coming I intend.

2. What is meant by their sinful distempers not being healed? Look what the waters of the sanctuary come to do; if that be not effected, they are not healed.

Now there are two effects here ascribed unto the waters of the sanctuary. (1.) They quicken, and give new life, ver. 9. A natural life they had before, but these give them another life. (2.) Healing, as the waters of Jericho by Elisha, 2 Kings ii. 21. Where these effects are not produced, that is the condition described, that is the state of these 'miry and marshy places, they are not healed.'

(1.) Men are not quickened; they receive not a new spiritual life; they are not so brought to the knowledge of God. It is not enough that men have their affections wrought upon, or their lives in some measure reformed, unless they are quickened; unless they receive a new spiritual life by the

word, they are as the unhealed places over whom the curse here mentioned hangs.

(2.) The healing of these quickened souls, consists in the curing and mortifying of their sinful distempers. This follows the other. Where there is life, there will be healing. Let not men pretend that they live spiritually, if their lusts be not healed. If men are proud, worldly, sensual, they are dead also; there is no effect of the waters of the sanctuary upon them. If men are not made holy, humble, believing, zealous, if they receive not the Spirit of prayer and faith, they are not healed.

This is the condition of the 'marshy and miry places' here mentioned. God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, causeth the gospel to be dispensed among a people, to be preached, where they do, or may, and ought to attend unto it. But they are not converted by the word, not sanctified by it, but continue in their old state and condition; he that was filthy is filthy still; he that was unrighteous is so still; he that was in the mire of the world and sin, is so still.

3. What is the lot and portion of such persons? Why, 'they shall be given to salt;' that is, as I have shewed, to barrenness, fruitlessness, unprofitableness, and eternal ruin.

This is the meaning of the proposition; and it is a dreadful word, which yet is true, and will prove so at the last day. Woe to the 'miry and marshy places' of the world: woe to the persons and places to whom the waters of the sanctuary have come, and they are not healed.

I shall not need to insist much on the proof of the proposition, the Scripture so abounds with testimonies of it. But I shall do these three things: 1. Name some places that plainly speak the same truth; 2. Shew the degrees in which God proceeds usually in this great work, in giving up unprofitable hearers to ruin; and, 3. Give the grounds of it.

1. For other Scriptures which assert the same truth; take Prov. i. 25—31. 'But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for

that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.' Prov. xxix. 1. 'He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' Luke xiii. 6. 'He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none,' &c. So Heb. x. 28—30. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

2. For the degrees of rejection, see Ezek. x. 18. xi. 23. Heb. vi. 8. 'But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' They are first rejected, then cursed, and lastly burned. But,

3. That which I shall principally insist upon, is to shew the ways whereby God doth usually proceed in giving up such persons to barrenness, and so to everlasting ruin.

(1.) He casts them out of his care; he will be at no more charge nor cost with them, nor about them. So Heb. vi. 8. the land is ἀδόκιμος, 'rejected;' the owner will take no more care or pains about such an unprofitable piece of land: he will till it no more, dress it no more; but leave it to its own barrenness. God is the great husbandman; John xv. 1. When a miry place is not healed, he will cast it out of his husbandry. So Ezek. xxiv. 13. They have had their time and season, and 'are not purged;' therefore 'they shall be purged no more.' Jer. vi. 29, 30. 'The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver shal men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.' This the Lord Christ declares to be his way of proceeding with them. Zech. xi. 8, 9. 'My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. Then said I, I will not feed you; that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.' A sad parting the Lord knows. They give up Christ; he gives up them; and their meeting will be infinitely more sad to them. Now this the Lord doth several ways.

[1.] He will sometimes utterly remove the gospel from them; turn the stream of the waters of the sanctuary, that

they shall come to them no more. So he threatened the church at Ephesus of old; Rev. ii. 5. 'Remember from whence thou art fallen,' &c. 'or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.' They shall have the light of the word no more, it shall be removed and taken from them. Ah, how many places lie under this woful judgment of God at this day, this sentence of being given up to salt for ever! Places there are in the world, that have enjoyed the word at God's appointed season, or at least, the tender of it, and opportunity to enjoy it; but continuing unprofitable under it; what is now their state and condition? God hath left them to that sore judgment, that they themselves should be made instrumental to cast out the word from amongst them; like the foolish woman pulling down the house with their own hands; and so have got darkness for a vision, and they that would not rejoice in the truth, and in the light, do now through the tremendous judgment of God, triumph in darkness and in a thing of nought.

It is true, the gospel may be sometimes taken for a season from a people for their trial and exercise, and not penally: it may be driven from them and not absolutely sinned away. Now as the Lord hath many glorious ends in such a dispensation; so it may easily be known whether people have lost the gospel only for a season in a way of trial; or penally as a beginning of their being given up to salt and barrenness. As,

1st. They that are deprived for a season of gospel enjoyments for their trial and exercise, are sensible of the displeasure of God in that dispensation, and greatly humble themselves under his hand on that account. They say as the church in Micah vii. 9. 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me.' They look on this as the greatest calamity and trial that can befall them; whereas they that lose it penally, are either very little concerned about it, or do greatly rejoice at it: the word tormented them, and they are glad they are freed from it; Rev. xi. 10. 'And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that

dwelt on the earth.' Some never rejoice more, than when they are got quit of the gospel; and others are like Gallio. Now when such as these have the word taken from them, and are no way sensible of the displeasure of the Lord in it, nor do humble themselves before him on that account; it is a certain evidence that God is giving them up into a state of salt, that is, barrenness and eternal ruin.

2dly. They that are deprived of it, for a season in a way of trial, have no rest, but are earnest with the Lord for the return of it; 1 Sam. vii. 2. The ark was gone; and though they had peace and plenty, and all things else in abundance; yet all will not satisfy them, the ark is absent, that pledge of God's presence, and they lamented after him. So is it with these; let them have peace, or liberty, or prosperity, all is one; if they have not the ark, if they have not the gospel and ordinances of God, they can take no rest, but are still lamenting after the Lord, still longing after the enjoyment of his word. David doth excellently express this frame of heart, Psal. lxiii. 1, 2. 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is: to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' He was driven from the ordinances of God, the waters of the sanctuary came not to him. But now they from whom the word is taken penally, are no way troubled about it, nor do long after it; they rejoice in what they have in the room of it; are exceedingly well pleased without it. Let them have an increase of corn, and wine, and oil; let them have their lusts and their sports, their formalities and follies, they care not whether ever they hear of the word of the gospel any more. Such men are certainly entering into a condition of salt, of barrenness, and ruin.

3dly. They who are deprived of the word for a season, for their trial, have a high estimation and value of their mercy and privilege, who enjoy it. They do not think the proud happy, nor envy at prosperous wickedness, nor bow in their hearts before the Hamans of the earth. But those they think blessed, who enjoy the word, and the presence of God therein. This our Saviour teaches them to esteem, Luke xi. 28. 'But he said, yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.' David doth excellently

set out this frame of heart, Psal. lxxxiv. 4. 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee. Selah.' I am, saith he, a poor outcast, deprived of thy word and ordinances: O the blessed condition of those who enjoy them! Let them be what they will as to their outward state, they are in a blessed condition, if they may dwell in thy house, enjoy the privileges of the spiritual house of God, and his worship in the gospel. This is the frame of such persons; those only they esteem blessed, who are refreshed with the waters of the sanctuary: but none are more despised by those, from whom the gospel is judicially removed. It is the great, the mighty, the rich, the sensual, that they esteem blessed; for those others they esteem as the dirt or the mire.

Now hence it is, that God may at the same time remove his gospel from a place, judicially from some, and by a way of trial from others, whereby these contrary effects are produced: some are humbled under the hand of the Lord; mourn after his presence; and account them blessed who enjoy his ordinances: others triumph and rejoice in their condition, look upon it as good and blessed, at least are little concerned in the dispensation that God is dealing with them in. And as the Lord doth good to the former by this exercise, preparing them also for farther mercies, in a greater estimation of his word, and profiting under it when enjoyed: so to the other, this is the entrance of their ruin; they are cast out of the care of God; and you never see such a people afterward obtain mercy.

[2.] God doth this sometimes, though he causeth the word to be continued unto them, by restraining the efficacy of it, that it shall not profit them. Men may have lived out their season, that God hath given them to be healed in; and yet God have work to do in that place where they live, so that the word must be preached; some poor souls amongst them are to be quickened or healed, called or edified; so that he will not turn away the course of these holy waters, but continue the dispensation of the gospel. But as for those, who have withstood their season of healing, and are cast out of the care of God, God will so order things, that the word shall have no power upon them. Now though the righteous judgment of God have a hand in this matter; yet by his

permission, their own lusts are the immediate cause of it. As,

1st. They shall have some prejudices against them, by whom the gospel is dispensed in the power and purity of it, which shall keep them from attending unto, or profiting by their message. So in the days of Ahab, there were four hundred preachers that he had a mind to hear; but they were all false prophets, teachers of lies, idolatrous and superstitious: only there were two prophets of the Lord, Elijah the Tishbite, and Micaiah the son of Imlah; and both these he looked upon as his enemies, as persons not well affected unto him; so that he would believe nothing of what they preached. So of Elijah, 1 Kings xxi. 20. and of Micaiah, chap. xxii. 8. So shall it befall many whom God will leave to salt, because the season of their healing hath been withstood; though the word be preached, they shall have prejudices against the dispensers of it, so that they shall not profit by them. And little do they think that these prejudices and hard thoughts are chains and fetters to keep them in unto the judgment of the great day. And of this nature also are other prejudices, that men have.

2dly. He will suffer them to be unconquerably hardened in the love of some sin or lust, which shall keep off the power of the word from their hearts. So the ground here that is not healed, is said to be miry and marshy; such as hath a mixture of filth incorporated with it, sufficient to repel all the virtue of the healing waters of the sanctuary. Thus we see men every day so furiously set upon their lusts, sports, and sensuality, that they hate and are filled with madness and rage against all that would persuade them to sobriety: much more doth the word of the gospel torment them, so that they rise with fury against it; and this keeps them from profiting by it. 'They are given to salt.'

3dly. God withdraws the efficacy of his Spirit in the dispensation of the word, that it shall not have that strength and power on them as upon others. God sends his word towards his own in a way of covenant, and then it is always accompanied with his Spirit; Isa. lix. 21. And where God dealeth with men in covenant mercy, these go together. But now when he casts men out of his care, though the word may be preached to their ear, because of some others whom

he yet cares for; yet he hath said concerning them, that his 'Spirit shall strive with them no more:' and thence it is that the word makes no impression on them: its healing virtue is as to them withheld.

And this is the first thing the Lord doth to such poor creatures as he leaves to salt, to barrenness, and ruin, for despising the season and means of their healing. He casts them out of his care, as to the dispensation of the word.

SERMON XXXI.

We shall now proceed to the uses.

Use 1. Wonder not if you see a diversity of success in preaching of the word: some receive it with joy; the most despise it as a thing of nought. Whence is this difference? Multitudes are rejected of God, cast out of his care, barren-land, he will till them no more. A cursed state! Marvel not that many refuse to hear the word, that they love lies; they are given up of God to their heart's lusts. Marvel not that the word which they hear affects them no more; the power of the Spirit is withheld from them; multitudes are thus cast out of the care of God, and tokens of the plague are upon them: they like their condition, rejoice and triumph in it, think none so happy as themselves, and despise them that love the waters of the sanctuary: all which are tokens of this sore plague. Can they expel the gospel from any place? Can they quench the light that is in it? Can they triumph over the ways of God? They suppose they have gotten a great victory. This is not an ordinary judgment: they are, poor creatures, assuredly cast out of the care of God; 'they are given to salt;' and it is a miracle of mercy, if ever any of them be healed.

O, it is a woful thing to look on a place or persons that give evidences of their withstanding the season of their healing, as so many in this nation do! How was our Saviour affected with it in reference to Jerusalem; Luke xix. 41, 42. 'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.' Oh! if we had but any measure of that pity and compassion which dwelt in his holy soul, how could we pass through towns and cities, and see and hear, and not mourn!

Use 2. Take that advice of the prophet, Jer. xiii. 16. 'Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.'

(2.) The second thing that God doth, in giving up an unhealed land unto barrenness, is his judicial hardening of them, or leaving them to hardness and impenitency, that so they may fill up the measure of their sins; Heb. vi. 8. 'That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing.' When the care of God is once taken from them, they are nigh unto cursing; the next thing that God will do to them, is to curse them, as our Saviour did the barren fig-tree.

This woful judgment is at large set forth, Isa. vi. 9, 10. 'And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.' Isaiah was a gospel preacher; yet this, saith God, shall be the effect of thy preaching towards them that have withstood their season, and have not been healed by the word. And John tells us, that this very thing was accomplished, when the gospel was preached by our Saviour himself, chap. xii. 40, 41. And surely their condition is most woful, whom the preaching of the gospel hardeneth, whom the only remedy destroys.

Now there are four things in this spiritual judgment, that God sends upon unhealed souls, that have outlived their season of healing, more or less.

[1.] Blindness of mind and understanding. Their natural blindness and ignorance shall be increased and confirmed; and that by two ways.

1st. God will send them 'a spirit of slumber,' Rom. xi. 8. that is, a great inadvertency and negligence as to the things of the gospel, that are spoken of, or preached unto them. As men that slumber take little notice of what is spoken to them, or about them; they hear a noise, and sometimes discern a little what is spoken, but not to any use or purpose: so is it with these persons, on whom God doth judicially send this spirit of slumber; they hear the sound of the word, and sometimes it may be take notice of some one thing or other that is spoken; but to receive and understand the design of it, to ponder it and improve it, that they cannot do; they are under a spiritual slumber. We may see

multitudes in this condition every day, the word hath no life nor vigour towards them; they perceive not the mind of God in it; they understand it not; God hath given them 'a spirit of slumber,' and they die under it.

2dly. God sends them a spirit of giddiness, causing them to err in their ways; Isa. xix. 14. We have a notable instance of this judgment of God, 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. The waters of the sanctuary came unto them, and they were not healed; the gospel was preached unto them, but they withstood their season; they received not the love of the truth; they did not believe and obey, that they might be saved; because they had pleasure in unrighteousness. How then doth God deal with them? ver. 11. He will send them a spirit of giddiness or delusion, that 'they shall believe a lie,' false doctrine, false worship, superstition, and idolatry. This they shall believe, and have pleasure in; which will have the fearful end mentioned, ver. 12. And this judgment, as it is already come upon many, so it lies at the door, I fear, of the most. We see men every day, that have for some years, it may be, enjoyed the preaching of the gospel, but not being healed, quickened, and sanctified by it, are now with all greediness given up to follow after fables on the one hand, or superstition on the other; there is a spirit of giddiness from the Lord upon them. And by these means is the darkness of the minds of men increased, when God is giving of them up to barrenness.

[2.] Obstinacy in the will, or hardness of heart, properly so called, is in this judgment of God also. God will give up unhealed persons to hardness of heart. So is it in that place of Isa. vi. 10. and it is the same with that which the apostle calls, 'A reprobate mind;' Rom. i. 28. that is, a mind and heart that is good for nothing with regard to spiritual things, profligate, and altogether insensible of them. And when this befalls any, they will openly despise the word, and cast it off, using one foolish pretence or other for their so doing, as Jer. xliv. 16. with xliii. 2. Such persons, whenever the word is preached unto them, and it lies cross to their carnal imaginations, or sensual affections, lusts, or sports, rise up in their hearts with contempt, and rage against it. Sometimes they will colour their wickedness in their hearts by some pretence or other: this is the way,

the humour, the singularity of the preacher. Or sometimes their rage will carry them out directly against the word, without any colour or pretence, but because it displeaseth them. Or if they fall not thus into pride and rage, which usually is occasioned by their temptations, they grow utterly senseless and stupid, and unconcerned in the things of God. Let the word thunder from heaven against their sins, they regard it not. Let the still small voice of the gospel persuade them unto reconciliation, they attend not unto it. Let the judgments of God be abroad in the world, if they escape themselves, they are not concerned about them. Do they reach their own persons; they have wrath, and anger, and vexation; but they cannot repent, or turn to the Lord. This is apparently the condition of most in the world.

[3.] Sensuality of affections is in this judgment also; Rom. i. 26. 'He gave them up to vile affections;' that is, to place their affections on vile, sensual things. Unhealed persons shall do so. Our streets, ale-houses, and many other places, are full of such whose affections are fixed with madness on vile things; and they please themselves in them, little thinking that this is part of the judgment whereunto they are given up of God, for their unprofitableness under the word; for their not being healed by the waters of the sanctuary.

[4.] Searedness of conscience; 1 Tim. iv. 2. 'Having their conscience seared with a hot iron.' Eph. iv. 19. 'Being past feeling.' Whatever sin they commit, or condition they fall into, conscience shall no more discharge its duty in them, and towards them.

And this is the second thing that God will do towards such unhealed persons.

(3.) The third thing considerable is the event of this dealing of God with them; or what is meant by this land's becoming salt.

Two things, as I have shewed before, are hereby intended: [1.] Barrenness in this world; [2.] Eternal ruin in the world to come.

[1.] Barrenness: they shall never bear any fruit to God. This was the curse that our Saviour gave to the fig-tree: 'Never fruit grow on thee.' Man was made to bear fruit

unto God; this is all he came into the world for. Now when God shall say to any, Go your ways, you shall never do any thing more for me, whilst you live in this world; you shall never bear any fruit to me: what sorer judgment can any man possibly fall under? I might shew you the misery of this condition in many particulars. 'Israel is an empty vine;' Hos. x. 1.

[2.] Eternal ruin, and that irreparable. Prov. xxix. 1. 'He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' John xv. 6. 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.' 2 Thess. ii. 12. 'That they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' Heb. vi. 8. 'But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' This is the certain event of that land, that is left unto salt, because not healed; and of those persons, who having passed over their season of quickening and sanctifying by the word, are given up to barrenness and ruin. It will do neither me nor you good to flatter you, and to put you into any better hope, than your condition will admit of. See Ezek. xxxiii. 8. 'When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.' This will be the end of the one and the other, when that course is taken. Did I not see the tokens of this judgment of God abroad in the world, I would not thus insist upon it as I do.

Use 1. Of exhortation. Make use of your season, that you fall not under this sore and inexpressible judgment. God gives men a season, a space to repent in; Rev. ii. 21. This space and season, as I have shewed you before, is not ofttimes all the while that the gospel is preached unto you. The word may be preached, and yet its efficacy wholly restrained from you, and that because your time and season is gone. And so it comes to pass daily; and you know not how soon it may be your lot and portion, and you perceive it not. Therefore is the apostle so earnest in exhorting men to make use of their day, before their season be gone, Heb.

iii. 12, 13. 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' As if he should say, Take heed to yourselves, stir up yourselves, for if your day be once passed over, you are then gone for ever; it will then be too late for you to look out after mercy. And so again, 2 Cor. vi. 2. Now is the day; now is the time. If you stand in need of any commodity, that can be had but at one fair, that day, that season you will not neglect. You stand in need, I am sure, of grace, mercy, pardon, Christ, life, salvation; there is only this day, this season for you to obtain it in: O, that you would be persuaded to look out after it, before it be hidden from you! See Heb. x. 31. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' So the same apostle again, Heb. xii. 15. 'Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.' Use all diligence in this matter.

To excite you a little to this, consider,

(1.) That if you are not healed during your season, you can never be healed. If the gospel cure you not, you must die in your sins. Men are greatly mistaken, when they flatter themselves, that it can never be too late for them in this world, there is time enough whilst they are alive. Alas! you have but your season; and that may be over with you many days before you leave the world, yea many years. We have everywhere ground evidently 'left to salt,' though yet not burned up. Use your day.

(2.) You know not how your day is going away, nor when it will be over. The traveller on the road, that hath a journey to go, knows how to order his affairs. It is, saith he, so many hours to night, and I have time enough before me; so doth the labouring man also: but, alas! it is not so with you; you know not how soon your day may be over. I speak not of your lives, which the Lord knows are uncertain; but the day of the gospel may be over, whilst the day of your lives continue. Nor can you be certain of the day of the preaching of the word; but your day, and your season in it, may come to an end, this day or this night, for ought that you or I know. So that your concernment is unspeakably great in the proposal that is made unto you.

Remember the virgins that were shut out, and their cry at midnight.

You will say then, What shall we do to know when it is our season, that we may apply our hearts unto this exhortation?

I answer: The Lord alone, who is the searcher of all hearts, knows how it is with you; and whether you have not any of you in particular outstood your opportunity. I can only tell you what is a gospel season, which you are to take care, that you may have a share and interest in.

[1.] It is required that the gospel be preached in the power and purity of it. This in general makes 'the acceptable day, the time of salvation.' And if there be nothing else concurring, this is enough to let a people, or person know, that the day of the Lord is come upon them, that the waters of the sanctuary are come unto them. Now consider with yourselves, whether the gospel be preached unto you or not. Or whether you may not, or might not have it so preached unto you, or enjoy the dispensation of it, did you but discharge your duty. If it be so, this is one evidence that it is yet your day.

[2.] It is a special season, when providential calls do join in with, and farther gospel calls; when God causes the gospel to be dispensed unto a people, and at the same time puts forth some acts of his providence, that are suited to awaken men to the consideration of their state and condition, then is the season of that people. I shall not go over the several providential calls that have been upon us, to inquire after the ways of God. Are all the alterations that have been amongst us, discovering the great uncertainty of all things that are here below, no call? Was there no call in the great unseasonableness of the year? No call in the danger of the loss of the gospel, which seems to stand ready for its flight from you? the great uncertainty how long you may enjoy these waters of the sanctuary? It is certain, that if you have not neglected already your season, your day of grace, you are now under the time that you are to be tried in.

[3.] Then is the season, when God moves at some seasons more effectually upon your hearts and spirits in the dispensation of the word, than at other times. This you alone can give an account of; you only know how it is with you; you can tell, whether you have not been moved by the

word more than formerly, or convinced by it; whether you have not had purposes of amendment and reformation wrought in you by it; whether you have not been caused to love it more than you have done formerly; whether it hath not begotten at times resolutions in you to try for life and immortality. If it have not, it is much to be feared lest the Lord is leaving of you to salt, to an estate of perishing and everlasting ruin. But if you have had such effects wrought in you, know of a certain, that the kingdom of God hath come unto you; and if you withstand your opportunity, you are gone and undone for ever, unless you make thorough work before this dispensation be overpast.

[4.] When you see others about you earnest after the word; this is God's call and ordinance unto you to look to your own condition.

If now by any of these means you come to know that the day of the Lord, and the season of your healing is upon you; oh, that you would be prevailed with to be wise for your own souls, and to close with the word of the gospel, before the things of your peace be hidden from your eyes!

I thought, in the next place, to have given you the signs of a departing gospel day, and evidences of men's having outlived their season, and being given up to salt and barrenness; but for some reasons forbear.

Use. 2. To discover the miserable condition of poor creatures, that having not in their season been healed by the waters of the sanctuary, are given up of the Lord to salt and barrenness. No heart can conceive, nor tongue express the misery of such poor creatures. Let me only mention some particulars.

(1.) They know not that they are so miserable. They perceive not, they understand not the sore judgment that they are under. Do but their heads ache, or are they sick of an ague, they feel it presently, and seek out for remedies; but in this case the curse of God is upon them, and they do not at all perceive it, and so seek not out for relief; Hos. vii. 9. 'Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.' They are nigh to ruin, to destruction, and perceive it not, they take no notice of the misery that is at hand ready to devour them; or if at any time they begin so

to do, they shift off the thoughts of it, which is a great part of their misery.

(2.) They are pleased with the condition in which they are; 'they cry peace and safety, when sudden destruction is at hand;' 1 Thess. v. 3. They please themselves in their condition, when the vengeance of the Lord is ready to seize upon them. Is the gospel removed from them, and the streams of the sanctuary turned away? They are so far from being troubled at it, that they rejoice in it, as hath been declared: they think they may now follow their lusts freely, and do whatever seems good unto themselves: they despise others and bless themselves, as if all were well with them. Or is the word yet continued, but they left to senselessness and salt under it? They are pleased with their estate, wonder at those who are troubled under the word, and exceedingly despise them. All is well with themselves; and some of them are ready to deride all others that are under the work of the Lord. On this account it is, that they do not, will not, look out for relief, or healing.

(3.) No man can help, or relieve them. Men may pity them, but they cannot help them. All the world cannot pull a poor creature out from under the curse of the great God.

(4.) Their eternal ruin is certain, as before proved.

(5.) This ruin is very sore on gospel despisers.

SERMON XXXII.*

GOD'S WITHDRAWING HIS PRESENCE, THE CORRECTION OF HIS CHURCH.

O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.—Isa. lxiii. 17.

These are words that carry a great deal of dread in them: tremendous words, methinks, as any in the book of God. And according as our concernment shall be found in them, they require very sad thoughts of heart. It is come now to the last, this is the last cast; if we miss in pursuing this great inquiry, we are undone for ever: 'O Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways? Why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear;' God is in this matter whereof we have been complaining.

It is the true church of God that speaks these words. This is plain in the acting of faith as to the great interest and privilege of adoption, in the verse foregoing, where they say, 'Doubtless thou art our Father:' however things are with us, 'doubtless thou art our Father.' When all other evidences fail, faith will secretly maintain the soul with a persuasion of its relation unto God; as you see by the church in this place. They were 'all as an unclean thing,' and their 'holiness all faded away as a leaf;' Isa. lxiv. 6. And yet faith maintains a sense of a relation to God; and therefore they cry, 'Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: O Lord, thou art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.' And I am persuaded some of you have found it so, that faith hath maintained an interest in a relation to God, when all particular evidences have failed. So it is in

* This sermon was preached ona solemn day of fasting and prayer, March 21, 1675. For which occasion the Doctor had prepared another discourse, but by a special reason which then occurred, had his thoughts directed to this subject.

our head, Jesus Christ, when he cried, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' When all particular evidences fail, he can still say, 'My God, my God.' So is it here with this miserable and distressed church and people of God; all is lost and gone, and yet faith cries, 'Doubtless thou art our Father.' And if in the matters of this day, God would help us to maintain, and not let go our interest in him as our Father by faith, we should have a bottom and foundation to stand upon. If it be so with us as hath been confessed to God, and I fear it is worse, we shall be at a loss for our particular evidences, at one time or other; but yet it will be a great advantage when faith can maintain its station, and we be enabled to say, 'Though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel will not own us,' such vile creatures; 'and though our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,' and our holiness 'fadeth away as a leaf,' and our adversaries have trodden upon us, 'yet doubtless thou art our Father.' The Lord help us to say thus when we depart, and we shall yet have a foundation of hope.

I would observe here the condition of the church at that time. It was a state of affliction and oppression; of oppression on the one hand, and of deep conviction of sin on the other. It is well when they go together.

First, It was a time of distress and oppression; as is declared, ver. 18. 'Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary.' The adversary had grievously oppressed them: but that which the church was most concerned in, was, that they had trodden down the sanctuary, disturbed the holy assemblies, and broken up the worship of God. And it is well, brethren, if under all oppression and distresses that may befall us, we do really find our principal concern is for the treading down God's sanctuary. Whatever else lay upon them, this was that they complained of; 'Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary.'

Secondly, It was also a time of deep conviction of sin with them. As the prayer is continued unto the end of the next chapter, you may see what a deep conviction of sin was fallen upon them, in ver. 6, 7. 'Behold we are all as an unclean thing, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name,

that stirreth up himself to take hold on thee: thou hast hid thy face from us, and melted us down because of our iniquities.'

Well then, suppose it be a state of great oppression, and a state of great conviction of sin: what is the course that we should take? We may turn ourselves this way and that way; but the church, you see, is come to this, to issue all in an inquiry after, and a sense of God's displeasure, manifesting itself by spiritual judgments. And this, in truth, brethren, if I understand any thing of the state and condition of my own soul, and yours, and of the generality of the churches of God in the world, is that which we are in particular called to, and where we are to issue all this business: namely, to inquire into God's displeasure, and the reason of it, manifesting itself in spiritual judgments. 'O Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways? And why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?'

It is but a little I shall speak to you at this time: God, I hope, will give us other seasons to pursue the same design; my present distemper, and other occasions, will not suffer me now to enlarge; however, I will lay a foundation (if God help me) by opening the words unto you.

I. What is it to err from the ways of God?

II. What is it to have our hearts hardened from the fear of God?

III. What ways are there, whereby God may cause us to err from his ways, and harden our hearts from his fear?

IV. What may be the reasons why the Lord should deal thus severely with a poor people, after they have walked with him, it may be, many years, that at length they should be brought to this complaint: 'Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear?' And then,

V. What is to be done for relief in this condition? What course is to be taken?

These are the things that should be first spoken to from the text; and then we should come to the last clause: 'Return for thy servants' sake,' &c. I shall proceed as far as I am able.

I. What is it to err from the ways of God?

The ways of God are either God's ways towards us, or

our ways towards him, that are of his appointment. God's ways towards us are the ways of his providence. Our ways towards God are the ways of obedience and holiness. We may err in both.

I think in that place of the Hebrews, 'They have always erred in heart, and have not known my ways,' God principally intends his ways towards them; they did not know the ways of his providential workings, how mightily he had wrought for them. But the ways that God hath appointed for us to walk in towards him, are these here intended. Now we may err from thence two ways: 1. In the inward principle; 2. In the outward order.

1. We may err in the inward principle. When the principle of spiritual life in our hearts decays, when we 'fade as a leaf,' and wither, then is this our case.

2. We err as to outward order, when we fail in the performance of duty in our walking, and in the course of our obedience and holiness that God hath called us unto. These for the most part go together. But from the text, and the whole context, I judge the first here to be principally intended; a failing in the principle, in our hearts, and in a lively power of walking in the ways of God, and of living unto him. So that to err from the ways of God, is to have our hearts weakened, spiritually disenabled, often turned aside from the vigorous, effectual, powerful walking with God, which we are called unto.

II. What is it to have our hearts hardened from the fear of God?

There is a twofold hardening from God's fear: 1. There is a total hardening; and, 2. A partial hardening.

1. There is a total hardening, like that mentioned, Isa. vi. 10. 'Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.' This was a total hardening that came upon the Jews when they rejected Christ. That is not the hardening here intended: those that are given up to a total hardness will not thus humble themselves before God, nor plead with God. Blessed be God that he hath not given us up to a total hardening, that we should utterly and wickedly depart from his ways.

2. There is a partial hardening, mentioned by the apostle, Heb. iii. 13. Take heed, 'lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;' lest there come a hardness upon you that may be to your disadvantage. And it is this partial hardening that is here intended: and wherein it consists, I shall speak a little afterward. It is this partial hardening that is intended in the text: 'Thou hast hardened our hearts from thy fear.'

III. How is God said to cause us to err from his ways, and to harden our hearts from his fear?

God is said to do it these several ways:

1. God is said to do that (and it is not an uncommon form of speech in Scripture) whose contrary he doth not do, when it might be expected, as it were, from him. If there be a prophet that doth prophesy so and so, 'I the Lord have deceived that prophet,' Ezek. xiv. 9. that is, I have not kept him from being deceived, but suffered him to follow the imaginations of his own heart, whereby he should be deceived. God may be said to cause us to err from his ways, and to harden our hearts from his fear merely negatively, in that he hath not kept us up to his ways, nor kept our hearts humble and soft in them.

Again, God hardens men judicially, in a way of punishment. This is a total hardening, of which we spoke before. And there are these acts of it, which I think are as evident in the times wherein we live, as the judgments of God have been in the plague, or burning of the city, inundations, or any thing else. Spiritual judgments of God in hardening the hearts of men judicially and penally to their destruction, are as visible to every considering person, as any of God's outward judgments whatsoever. This will appear if we consider the following things wherein it consists.

(1.) The first thing God doth, when he hardens men's hearts penally, is to give them up to their own lusts. It is directly expressed, Rom. i. 24. 'Wherefore God gave them up to their hearts' lusts.' When God leaves men, and gives them up to pursue their own lusts with delight and greediness, then he is hardening them. And this is a visible judgment of God at this day: he takes off shame, fear, all restraint and disadvantages, and gives men up to their hearts' lusts.

(2.) The second thing is, that God in penal hardening,

gives men up to Satan to blind them, darken them, harden them; for he is 'the God of this world that blinds the eyes of men.' And the great work of blinding and hardening men is committed unto him: and the principal way whereby he works at this day, is by being a lying spirit in the mouth of the false prophets, crying, Peace, peace, when God hath not spoken a word of peace. As it was in the business of Ahab, when Satan went and catched at a commission to seduce Ahab to go up to Ramoth Gilead; he did it by being a lying spirit in the mouths of the false prophets. God is visibly at work in the world with this judgment, giving men up unto Satan, acting in the mouths of the false prophets, who cry, Peace, peace, to all sorts of sinners, when God speaks not one word of peace.

(3.) The third way whereby God doth judicially give up men to hardness of heart, is, by supplying them in his providence with opportunities to draw out their lusts. They shall have opportunity for them. It is commonly given for one of the darkest dispensations of divine providence towards men, when it orders things so that they shall have opportunities to accomplish their lusts, and go on in their ways administered unto them.

(4.) Lastly, In pursuit of all these God gives them over to a 'reprobate mind,' Rom. i. that is, a mind that can neither judge nor approve of any thing that is good. Propose to men the most convincing things wherein their own interest and concern lies, shew them that eternal ruin lies at the door, it is all one, they having a mind that can judge of nothing that is good. And the world is full of evidences of this work of God.

3. God may be said to cause men to err from his ways, and to harden their hearts from his fear, by withholding, upon their provocation, some such supply of his Spirit, and actings of his grace, as they have formerly enjoyed to keep up their hearts to the ways, and in the fear of God. And that is the hardening here intended. The Lord had withheld upon just provocations, those supplies of his grace and Spirit which formerly were enjoyed, and which had given them a vigorous spirit in the ways of God, and a tender heart in the fear of God, which now they have lost, or else they could never have been sensible of it.

From what has been said we may make the following observations.

Observation 1. Even true believers themselves may for a season so err from the ways of God, as to have their hearts partially hardened from his fear, and may fall under this state and condition, to err from the ways of God, by a decay of the principle of grace; and so to have their hearts hardened from his fear, that they know not where they are, what they are doing, how it is with them, which way to look for relief to supply themselves, or how to recover strength, or heal themselves; but are forced to cry, 'O Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear?'

Observation 2. God himself hath a righteous hand in this frame of spirit, that sometimes befalls believers.

Observation 3. This frame is the most deplorable condition that can befall the church of God at any time; which is manifest upon these two accounts; that it both takes away all solid evidences of God's special love; and inevitably exposes us to outward distresses and ruin, if it be not remedied. And therefore it is a most deplorable condition to be brought into such a state.

Let us now a little inquire, as we before proposed, what it is to have our hearts hardened thus partially from the fear of God.

The fear of God may be considered in several respects: as it regards sin, and so is a fear of caution and humility; or as it regards judgments, and so is a fear of reverence, wisdom, and diligence to improve them; or lastly, as it regards duty, and so becomes a fear of obedience and watchfulness. Now the want of a due sense of sin, of judgments, or of a due attendance unto duties, is this partial hardening.

(1.) A partial hardening consists in the want of a due sense of sin. It is the fear of God alone that can give us a due sense of sin. Judgments will give dread, and convictions disquiet; but it is the fear of God alone that gives a due sense of sin. Therefore when we want this, our hearts are in some measure hardened from the fear of God, which discovers itself in the following particulars: [1.] A want of a due sense of secret sins; [2.] A want of a due sense of sin in an uncircumspect walking; [3.] A want of a due sense

of surprisal into known sins; [4.] A want of a due sense of the sins of others. Where these things are, there is hardening from the fear of God.

[1.] This hardening consists in a want of a due sense of secret sins. And there is much in this. I shall but just name things unto you. The psalmist lays great weight on it; Psal. xix. 12. 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; and cleanse thou me from secret faults.' In these two lie the life of a believer. And there is no more safety, if we are not cleansed from secret sins, than if we are not kept back from presumptuous sins. Every one will conclude, if they are not kept back from presumptuous sins, they are undone for ever; but the danger is the same, if they are not cleansed, and have not a due sense of secret sins.

If it be asked, What are these secret sins? 1st. They are the vain imaginations of the mind; 2dly. The corrupt actings of the affections of the heart; and, 3dly. A frame of soul suited unto them. These are the things I intend by secret sins.

1st. The vain imaginations of the mind. The Holy Ghost tells us that by nature 'all the imaginations of the heart of man are evil, and that continually.' And God knows what remainders there are of this vanity of mind, and these vain imaginations in all our hearts. I place it at the head of what I intend, whereof, if we have not a due sense, we are under hardening from the fear of God. These vain imaginations of our mind, are such as no eye sees, none knows, not the angels in heaven, nor the devils, but are the special object of the eye, and sight, and knowledge of God.

2dly. The corrupt actings and desires of our affections, wherein lust conceiveth. Lust tempts and seduces in vain imaginations, but conceiveth in the corrupt desires and actings of our affections.

3dly. And both these, if indulged in any measure, will be continually pressing upon our nature; both the vain imaginations of the mind, and the corrupt actings of the affections towards perishing, worldly, sensual things, either to lawful objects in an undue manner, or to unlawful objects, will both be pressing on the mind; and if, by solicitation, they take place upon it, then the mind is cast into a dead,

lifeless, carnal, loose frame; which frame also I reckon among these secret sins.

Now, brethren, more or less these things are true in us, according to the several degrees of grace we have received, through the woful negligence we have been betrayed into. Have we a due sense of these things? Or can we walk with boldness and confidence, peace and undisturbedness in our minds day and night, though these things be upon us? If so, we are in some measure hardened from the fear of God. The fear of God hath not its proper work upon us, which would keep us deeply sensible of these things, deeply afflict us for them, keep us in an abhorrence of them, and make us watchful against them night and day; and not suffer vain thoughts to come and go without spiritual conflicts, nor inordinate affections to the world, without wounds given to it by the Spirit of God. If it is not so with us, our hearts are hardened from the fear of God.

[2.] This partial hardening also contains in it a want of a due sense of an irregular course of walking. There is a course of walking that will please the world, satisfy the church, and which professors shall greatly approve of; and yet if a man come to examine his own heart by the rule, he shall find his course of walking judged: for though the world hath nothing to object against us, and though professors do well approve of us; yet when we come to the rule, that will discover our iniquity. We are bound to walk by rule: 'God will have mercy on them that walk according to this rule.' We are bound to walk circumspectly in all things: 'Walk circumspectly, redeeming the time; worthy of God; worthy of the Lord;' which extend to all duties of our walk in the whole course of our lives. If we satisfy ourselves that our walk is such as answers known duties that are required of us, that none in the world can lay blame upon us, and professors will approve of; but do not bring it to the rule, and judge it there, we err from the ways of God: and if we bring it to the rule, and judge it there, and have not a due sense, so as to be greatly humbled for it, our hearts are so far hardened from the fear of God; for if we were in the fear of God all the day long, as we ought to be, it would be so with us. Many men's boldness and confidence in the world, and many men's peace will be resolved

at length into a neglect of this duty, that they have not proved their walk by this rule, and that light God hath set up in their own souls. We may, I say, brethren, have something of this partial hardness upon our hearts in these instances, want of a deep sense as to secret sins, want of self-judging as to our irregular walking, wherein it comes short of the rule, the holy rule we are to attend unto. And who can say of his walk, that it is worthy of God and the Lord, which yet we are called unto? Alas, it is not worth the owning ourselves, and the profession we make; how much less is it worthy of God?

[3.] This hardening likewise carries it in a want of a due sense of sin upon surprisal into known sins. 'There is no man that liveth and sinneth not;' but this respects known sins: I do not mean sins that are known unto others, but sins we know in particular, wherein we have offended against God. And known sins are great sins, sins against light, and for the most part against engagements and promises of watchfulness; and there is something, if we examine thoroughly, of wilfulness in them: and great sins should have great sorrow and great humiliation. Truly, brethren, I am afraid, and I would be jealous over myself and you, that we are apt to put off even known sins upon slighter terms than the rule of the covenant doth admit of. We are apt to resolve them in general into the covenant of grace and mercy, or to pass them over with one or two confessions, or the like, and do not bring every known sin unto its proper issue in the blood of Christ, as we ought. If we do not do this, we are hardened thus partially from the fear of God. The true fear of God would keep us up to this, that no one known sin should ever pass us, without a particular issuing of it in the blood of Christ, and obtaining peace in it.

[4.] Want of a due sense of the sin of others is a great sign that we are partially hardened from God's fear; as it is a sign men are totally hardened, when they do not only commit sin themselves, but have pleasure in them that do it. We have before us the sins of professors, the sins of the world, the provoking sins of the nation, in the generation wherein we live, and the sins of all sorts of men; and I think there is not in any one duty more spiritual wisdom required of believers, than how to deport themselves, with a suitable

frame of heart, in reference to the sins of other men. Some are ready to be contented that they should sin, and sometimes ready to make sport at their sins, and for the most part it is indifferent unto us at what rate men sin in the world, so it go well with us or the church of Christ. We understand but little of that: 'Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law;' Psal. cxix. 136. I confess, I think there is little of this in the world that we can truly say, as he did, by the Spirit of God, that our eyes run down with water, because other men, all sorts of men, keep not God's law. There is a 'sighing and mourning for all the abominations that are done among a people.' What people? Truly people that were idolaters, and false worshippers, and very wicked, as that people was at that time: yet God required there should be 'sighing and mourning for all the abominations;' and took special notice of the working of grace that one way above all other things. And the Lord help us, I am afraid we have very small concern for the sins of other men. And it is resolved into these two principles: want of zeal for God's glory; and want of compassion to the souls of men, which would make us deeply concerned for the sins of other men. Sin in the world is grown a common thing to us; we do not rend our garments, when we hear of all the blasphemies and atheism in the world all the blood, uncleanness, profaneness, oaths. Every sin is grown common to us; nobody is affected; 'None taketh hold upon God,' saith the prophet. What will be the end of these things? Yet we speak of them as commonly as of our daily food. This is not to be under the power of the fear of the Lord. There is a partial hardness upon us from the fear of the Lord in that general, and almost universal unconcernedness that is upon us about the sins of other men.

I thought to have spoken to the remaining heads of this partial hardness of our hearts from God's fear; the want of a due sense of God's judgments; and the want of a due attendance unto, and walk with God in a way of duty: but I shall wave them, and proceed to the fourth thing proposed to be inquired into.

IV. Why doth the holy God deal thus with a professing people? What reason can we find in ourselves, why it should be so, in making this complaint, that we neither charge God

foolishly, as the author and cause of sin; nor go about to extenuate our own sins, but aggravate and burden our consciences with a sense of them? Why doth the holy God thus deal with us?

The reasons are of two sorts: 1. What provokes God unto it, which are the procuring reasons; 2. What God aims at in it, which are the final reasons, why it is thus with us.

1. What provokes God to it? I answer, three things.

(1.) Unthankfulness for mercy received. Thus in the chapter wherein is my text, it is said, ver. 8—10. 'Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.' God doth in this matter turn to be our enemy; he fights against us. Why doth he so? Because he hath redeemed us in his love, because he hath borne us in his arms all the days of our lives, because he hath manifested that in all our afflictions he was afflicted, because he had been a Saviour, and heard us; and under all these mercies received, we have rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit, have been unthankful and ungrateful: therefore he is become our enemy, and fights against us. I beg of you, brethren, that we may call over those innumerable mercies we have received from the Lord, spiritual mercies, temporal mercies, and consider whether these evils be not befallen us; whether our unthankfulness for mercy hath not caused God to become our enemy, and to fight against us.

(2.) A second reason is, inordinate cleaving to the things of the world at a most undue season. It may be it would not provoke God so much thus to fight against us, and harden our hearts from his fear, if the season of it was not undue. Do not we see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, that God is unsettling all things here below, and that all these things shall be dissolved? When God gives so many intimations, that 'all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?' Cleaving inordinately to the things of the world, at such a season, is that which provoketh God to deal thus; 'For the

iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him; I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.' God smote them for the iniquity of their covetousness in such a woful undue season. Let us, brethren, be at work; I may be under great mistakes and misapprehensions, but I must tell you what is upon my heart; I cannot but think, that unless we are particularly at work every one of us, we shall be overtaken with these dismal and dreadful effects, and God will appear against us, and fight against us.

(3.) The third reason is, our unprofitableness, and unsuitableness to the means of grace we have enjoyed. O, the barren land of England, upon which the rain hath often fallen, and hath brought forth nothing but briers and thorns! We have had our proportion in it, brethren, you of this congregation can even make your boast of what you have enjoyed of this and that man's ministry for many years; but, O, the leanness and barrenness that is among us now all is done, our unsuitableness to the means we have enjoyed! We may repent one day that we ever had any among us who excelled others in gifts and graces, if we profit no more. We have not profited suitably to the means we have enjoyed, but every vain and foolish imagination hath turned us aside from keeping as we ought to the good and holy ways of God. We do not flourish in fruitfulness, in savouriness, and profitableness answerable to what the dispensations of God have been towards us; for the dew of God hath been upon us from time to time.

Now besides these things named, which are public causes, why God hath brought us under this dispensation, let us all search our hearts, and say, 'Lord, why hast thou caused me thus far to err from thy ways, and hardened my heart from thy fear?' Why have I not former faith, love, affections, zeal? Why do not I mourn more? Where are my tears and humiliation? Those heart-breaking sighs and groans after God which my heart was once filled withal? O Lord, 'why is my heart thus hardened from thy fear?' Let us inquire into the particular reasons, that at last we may come to cry, 'Return, O Lord, for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thy inheritance.'

2. What does God aim at in such a dispensation? We

have mentioned the procuring reasons and causes: now what are the final ends, why God will thus deal with us?

There are two ends the holy God seems to have in these things.

(1.) The first is to awaken us unto the consideration of what an all-seeing God he is, with whom we have to do. When we please the world, and one another, and ourselves in our walkings and conversations, God will have us know, he is displeased. Though we please ourselves, and cry, Peace, and please the world, and one another; yet God will so withdraw his Spirit and grace, that we shall be forced to say, Why is God thus displeased with us? He will have us glorify him, as one that is an all-seeing God; as one that knows our inward frames, and tries us upon them.

(2.) God doth it to awaken us. If there be any thing of true grace in our hearts, a sense of spiritual judgments will awaken us, when all outward judgments in the world will not do it: no, if thunder and lightning be round about us, if ruin and the sword before us, and the earth underneath be ready to swallow us up, they will not work so kindly upon a believer's heart, as a sense of spiritual judgments. I hope God hath a design of love to awaken us all by this dispensation, to return unto him.

But to proceed to the last inquiry.

V. What way shall we take now for retrieving our souls out of this state and condition?

One way is prescribed here. It is by prayer: 'Return, O Lord.' It is to beg of God to return.

What arguments have we to plead with God to return? This being the case, the arguments here given are peculiar to the case; and we may plead them. They are two: 1. Sovereign mercy and compassion; and, 2. Faithfulness in covenant. They are both here pleaded.

1. Sovereign mercy: ver. 15. 'Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercy towards me? are they restrained?' Our great plea in this case is upon sovereign mercy and compassion. Plead the pity of God; beg mercy of God; come to God, as those that stand in need of mercy, and of the sounding of his bowels.

2. The second argument is, God's faithfulness in the covenant: ver. 16. 'Doubtless thou art our Father:' we are thine.

These are the two arguments we are night and day to plead with God, for our recovery from this state and condition of erring from the ways of God, and of having our hearts hardened from his fear: sovereign mercy, and covenant faithfulness. And this is all I shall speak to at this time.

SERMON XXXIII.*

PERILOUS TIMES.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.
2 Tim. iii. 1.

You know my way and manner upon these occasions, is to speak as plainly and familiarly as I can, unto what is of our present concernment; and so I design to do at this time, if it shall please God to help under infirmities.

The words contain a warning of imminent dangers. And there are four things in them. First, The manner of the warning: 'This know also.' Secondly, The evil itself that they are warned of: 'perilous times.' Thirdly, The way of their introduction: they 'shall come.' Fourthly, The time and season of it: they 'shall come in the last days.'

First, The manner of the warning: 'This know also.' Thou Timothy, unto the other instructions which I have given thee, how to behave thyself in the house of God, whereby thou mayest be set forth as a pattern unto all gospel ministers in future ages, I must also add this: 'This know also.' It belongs to thy office and duty to know and consider the impending judgments that are coming upon churches.

And so, as a justification of my present design, if God enable me unto it, I shall here premise, That it is the duty of the ministers of the gospel to foresee and take notice of the dangers which the churches are falling into. And the Lord help us, and all other ministers, to be awakened unto this part of our duty. You know how God sets it forth Ezek. xxxiii. in the parable of the watchman, to warn men of approaching dangers. And truly God hath given us this law: if we warn the churches of their approaching dangers, we discharge our duty; if we do not, their blood will be required at our hands. The Spirit of God foresaw negligence apt to grow upon us in this matter; and therefore the Scrip-

* This sermon was preached Nov. 3, 1676, being a day set apart for solemn fasting and prayer.

ture only proposeth duty on the one hand; and on the other requires the people's blood at the hands of the watchmen, if they perform not their duty So speaks the prophet Isaiah, chap. xxi. 8. 'He cried, A lion: My Lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower.' A lion is an emblem of approaching judgment. 'The lion hath roared, who can but tremble?' saith the prophet Amos. It is the duty of ministers of the gospel to give warning of impending dangers.

Again, the apostle in speaking unto Timothy, speaks unto us also, to us all: 'This know ye also.' It is the great concern of all professors and believers of all churches, to have their hearts very much fixed upon present and approaching dangers. We have inquired so long about signs, tokens, and evidences of deliverance, and I know not what, that we have almost lost the benefit of all our trials, afflictions, and persecutions. The duty of all believers, is to be intent upon present and imminent dangers. 'O Lord,' say the disciples, Matt. xxiv. 'what shall be the sign of thy coming?' They were fixed upon his coming. Our Saviour answers, I will tell you. 1. There shall be an abounding of errors and false teachers: many shall say, 'Lo, here is Christ, and lo there is Christ.' 2. There shall be an apostacy from holiness: 'Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.' 3. There shall be great distress of nations: 'Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.' 4. There shall be great persecutions: 'And they shall persecute you, and bring you before rulers, and you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.' 5. There shall be great tokens of God's wrath from heaven: 'Signs in the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars.' The Lord Christ would acquaint believers how they should look for his coming: he tells them of all the dangers. Be intent upon these things; I know you are apt to overlook them, but these are the things that you are to be intent upon.

Not to be sensible of a present perilous season, is that security which the Scripture so condemns; and I will leave it with you in short under these three things: 1. It is that frame of heart which of all others God doth most detest and abhor. Nothing is more hateful to God than a secure frame in perilous days. 2. I will not fear to say this, and go with it, as to my sense, to the day of judgment: A secure person,

in perilous seasons, is assuredly under the power of some predominant lust, whether it appears, or not. 3. This secure, senseless frame is the certain presage of approaching ruin. This know, brethren, pray know this, I beg of you, for yours and my own soul, that you will be sensible of, and affected with, the perils of the season, whereinto we are cast. What they are, if God help me, and give me a little strength, I shall shew you by and by.

Secondly, There is the evil and danger itself thus forewarned of: and that is, καιροὶ χαλεποὶ, hard times, perilous times, times of great difficulty, like those of public plagues, when death lies at every door; times that I am sure we shall not all escape, let it fall where it will. I will say no more of it now, because it is that which I shall principally speak to afterward.

Thirdly, The manner of their introduction, ἐνστήσονται, 'shall come.' We have no word in our language that will express the force of ἐνίστημι. The Latins express it by, 'immineo, incido,' the coming down of a fowl unto his prey. Now our translators have given it the greatest force they could. They do not say, 'Perilous times will come,' as though they prognosticated future events; but, 'Perilous times shall come.' Here is a hand of God in this business: they shall so come, be so instant in their coming, that nothing shall keep them out; they shall instantly press themselves in, and prevail. Our great wisdom then will be to eye the displeasure of God in perilous seasons, since there is a judicial hand of God in them: and we see in ourselves reason enough why they should come. But when shall they come?

Fourthly, They 'shall come in the last days,' ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. The words 'latter,' or 'last days,' are taken three ways in Scripture: sometimes for the times of the gospel, in opposition to the Judaical church state, as in Heb. i. 1. 'Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.' And elsewhere it may be taken (though I remember not the place) for days towards the consummation of all things, and the end of the world. And it is taken often for the latter days of churches; 1 Tim. iv. 1. 'The Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.' And so the apostle John, 1 Epist. ii. 18. 'Little chil-

dren, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time.' And that is the season here intended. But yet you may take it in what sense you will: the last days, the days of the gospel; the last days towards the consummation of all things, and the end of the world; the last days following the days of the profession of churches, those called reformed churches, or our own churches in the ways wherein we walk; and the last days with many of us, with respect to our lives. In whatever sense the words are taken, it is time for us to look what shall come in these last days.

But the observation which at present I shall insist on from the text, is this:

Observation. When churches have been continued for awhile in their profession, and begin to fall under decays therein, perilous seasons shall overtake them, which it will be hard for them to escape. 'This know also, that perilous times shall come.'

My design is only to dispose your minds a little to the work of the day: and all I shall do is to shew in several instances what are the things that make a season perilous; and what is our duty with reference unto such perilous seasons, both as to particular perils, and perilous times in general. And it must not be said, as once it was of the prophet Ezekiel: 'He prophesied of things a great way off.' We do not prophecy of things a great way off; no, we shall speak of things that are even upon us, what we see and know, and is as evident, as if written with the beams of the sun.

1. The first thing that makes a season perilous, is, when the profession of true religion is outwardly maintained under a visible predominancy of horrible lusts and wickedness. And the reason why I name it in the first place is, because it is what the apostle gives his instance in, in this place: 'Perilous times shall come.' Why? 'For many shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness;' maintaining their pro-

fession of the truth of religion under a predominancy, a visible, open predominancy of vile lusts, and the practice of horrible sins. This rendered the season perilous. Whether this be such a season or not, do you judge. And I must say by the way, we may and ought to witness against it, and mourn for the public sins of the days wherein we live. It is as glorious a thing to be a martyr for bearing testimony against the public sins of an age, as in bearing testimony unto any truth of the gospel whatsoever.

Now where these things are, a season is perilous,

1. Because of the infection: churches and professors are apt to be infected in it. The historian tells us of a plague at Athens, in the second and third year of the Peloponnesian war, whereof multitudes died; and of those that lived, few escaped, but they lost a limb, or part of a limb, some an eye, others an arm, and others a finger; the infection was so great and terrible. And truly, brethren, where this plague comes, of the visible practice of unclean lusts under an outward profession, though men do not die, yet one loses an arm, another an eye, another a leg by it; the infection diffuses itself to the best of professors, more or less. This makes it a dangerous and perilous time.

2. It is dangerous because of the effects; for when predominant lusts have broken all bounds of divine light and rule, how long do you think that human rules will keep them in order? They break through all in such a season as the apostle describes. And if they come to break through all human restraints, as they have broken through divine, they will fill all things with ruin and confusion.

3. They are perilous in the consequence, which is, the judgments of God. When men do not receive the truth in the love of it, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, God will send them strong delusions to believe a lie. So 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. is a description how the papacy came upon the world. Men professed the truth of religion, but did not love it; they loved unrighteousness and ungodliness, and God sent them popery. That is the interpretation of the place according to the best divines. Will you profess the truth, and at the same time love unrighteousness? The consequence is security under superstition and ungodliness. This is the end of such a perilous season: and the

like may be said as to temporal judgments, which I need not mention.

Let us now consider what is our duty in such a perilous season.

(1.) We ought greatly to mourn for the public abominations of the world, and of the land of our nativity wherein we live. I would only observe that place in Ezek. ix. God sends out his judgments and destroys the city; but before, he sets a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof. You will find this passage referred in your books to Rev. vii. 3. 'Hurt not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.' I would only observe this, that such only are the servants of God, let men profess what they will, 'who mourn for the abominations that are done in the land.' The mourners in one place, are the servants of God in the other. And truly, brethren, we are certainly to blame in this matter. We have been almost well contented that men should be as wicked as they would themselves, and we sit still and see what would come of it. Christ hath been dishonoured, the Spirit of God blasphemed, and God provoked against the land of our nativity; and yet we have not been affected with these things. I can truly say in sincerity, I bless God, I have sometimes laboured with my own heart about it. But I am afraid we all of us come exceeding short of our duty in this matter. 'Rivers of waters,' saith the psalmist, 'run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.' Horrible profanation of the name of God, horrible abominations, which our eyes have seen, and our ears heard, and yet our hearts been unaffected with them! Do you think this is a frame of heart God requireth of us in such a season, to be regardless of all, and not to mourn for the public abominations of the land. The servants of God will mourn. I could speak, but am not free to speak, to those prejudices which keep us off from mourning for public abominations; but they may be easily suggested unto all your thoughts, and particularly what they are that have kept us off from attending more unto this duty of mourning for public abominations. And give me leave to say, that according to the Scripture rule, there is no one of us can have any evidence that we shall escape outward

judgments that God will bring for these abominations, if we have not been mourners for them; but that as smart a revenge, as to outward dispensations, may fall upon us, as upon those that are most guilty of them; no Scripture evidence have we to the contrary. How God may deal with us, I know not.

This then is one part of the duty of this day, that we should humble our souls for all the abominations that are committed in the land of our nativity; and in particular, that we have no more mourned under them.

(2.) Our second duty, in reference to this perilous season, is to take care that we be not infected with the evils and sins of it. A man would think it were quite contrary; but really to the best of my observation, this is, and hath been the frame of things, unless upon some extraordinary dispensation of God's Spirit: as some men's sins grow very high, other men's graces grow very low. Our Saviour hath told us, Matt. xxiv. 12. 'Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will wax cold.' A man would think the abounding of iniquity in the world should give great provocation to love one another. No, saith our Saviour, the contrary will be found true: as some men's sins grow high, other men's graces will grow low.

And there are these reasons for it:

[1.] In such a season we are apt to have light thoughts of great sins. The prophet looked upon it as a dreadful thing, that upon Jehoiakim's throwing the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy into the fire, till it was consumed, 'yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants, that heard all these words;' Jer. xxxvi. 24. They were grown senseless both of sin and judgment. And where men (be they in other respects never so wise) can grow senseless of sin, they will quickly grow senseless of judgments too. And I am afraid the great reason why many of us have no impression upon our spirits of danger and perils, in the days wherein we live, is because we are not sensible of sin.

[2.] Men are apt to countenance themselves in lesser evils, having their eyes fixed upon greater abominations of other men, that they behold every day: nay, there are those, who pay their tribute to the devil, walk in such and such abominations, and so countenance themselves in lesser evils.

This is part of the public infection, that they 'do not run out into the same excess of riot that others do;' though they live in the omission of duty, conformity to the world, and in many foolish, hurtful, and noisome lusts. They countenance themselves with this, that others are guilty of greater abominations.

[3.] Pray let such remember this, who have occasion for it (you may know it better than I, but yet I know it by rule as much as you do by practice), that general converse in the world, in such a season, is full of danger and peril. Most professors are grown of the colour andcomplexion of those with whom they converse.

This is the first thing that makes a season perilous. I know not whether these things may be of concern and use unto you, they seem so to me; and I cannot but acquaint you with them.

II. A second perilous season, and that we shall hardly come off in, is, when men are prone to forsake the truth, and seducers abound to gather them up that are so; and you will have always these things go together. Do you see seducers abound? You may be sure there is a proneness in the minds of men to forsake the truth; and when there is such a proneness, they will never want seducers, those that will lead off the minds of men from the truth; for there is both the hand of God and Satan in this business. God judicially leaves men, when he sees them grow weary of the truth, and prone to leave it; and Satan strikes in with the occasion, and stirs up seducers. This makes a season perilous. The apostle describes it, 1 Tim. iv. 1. 'Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times,' these perilous days, 'some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.' And so Peter warns them to whom he writes, 2 Epist. ii. 1, 2. that 'there shall come false teachers among them, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction: and many shall follow their pernicious ways.' There shall come times full of peril, which shall draw men off from the truth, into destruction.

If it be asked, how we may know whether there be a

proneness in the minds of men in any season to depart from the truth? there are three ways whereby we may judge of it.

1. The first is that mentioned 2 Tim. iv. 3. 'The time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.' When men grow weary of sound doctrine, when it is too plain, too heavy, too dull, too common, too high, too mysterious, one thing or other that displeases them, and they would hear something new, something that may please; it is a sign that there is in such an age many who are prone to forsake sound doctrine: and many such we know.

2. When men have lost the power of truth in their conversation, and are as prone and ready to part with the profession of it in their minds. Do you see a man retaining the profession of the truth, under a worldly conversation? He wants but baits from temptation, or a seducer to take away his faith from him. An inclination to hearken after novelties, and loss of the power of truth in the conversation, is a sign of proneness unto this declension from the truth. Such a season, you see, is perilous. And why is it perilous? Because the souls of many are destroyed in it. The apostle tells us directly, 2 Pet. ii. 1. 'of false prophets among the people, who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.' Will it abide there? No: 'And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.' Brethren, while it is well with us through the grace of God, and our own houses are not in flames, pray do not let us think the times are not perilous, when so many turn unto popery and quakerism, into pernicious errors, and fall into swift destruction. Will you say the time of the public plague was not perilous, because you are alive? No. Was the fire not dreadful, because your houses were not burnt? No. You will notwithstanding say it was a dreadful plague, and a dreadful fire. And pray consider, is not this a perilous season, when multitudes have an inclination to depart from the truth, and God in just judgment hath permitted Satan to stir up seducers to draw them into pernicious ways, and their poor souls perish for ever?

Besides, there is a great aptness in such a season to work indifferency in the minds of those who do not intend utterly to forsake the truth. Little did I think, I should ever have lived in this world to find the minds of professors grown altogether indifferent, as to the doctrine of God's eternal election, the sovereign efficacy of grace in the conversion of sinners, justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ; but many are, as to all these things, grown to an indifferency, they know not whether they are so or not. I bless God, I know something of the former generation, when professors would not hear of these things without the highest detestation; and now high professors begin to be leaders in it, and it is too much among the best of us. We are not so much concerned for the truth as our forefathers: I wish I could say we were as holy.

3. This proneness to depart from the truth, is a perilous season, because it is the greatest evidence of the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from his church; for the Spirit of God is promised to this end, 'to lead us into all truth;' and when the efficacy of truth begins to decay, it is the greatest evidence of the departing and withdrawing of the Spirit of God. And I think that this is a dangerous thing; for if the Spirit of God departs, then our glory and our life depart.

What now is our duty in reference to this perilous season? Forewarnings of perils are given us to instruct us in our duty.

(1.) The first is, not to be content with what you judge a sincere profession of truth, but to labour to be found in the exercise of all those graces which peculiarly respect the truth. There are graces that peculiarly respect the truth, that we are to exercise; and if these are not found in our hearts, all our profession will issue in nothing.

And these are,

[1.] Love: 'Because they loved not the truth.' They made profession of the gospel, but they received not the truth in the love of it. There was want of love of the truth: truth will do no man good, where there is not the love of it. Speaking the truth in love, is the substance of our Christian profession. Pray, brethren, let us labour to love the truth, and take off all prejudices from our minds that we may do so.

[2.] It is the great and only rule to preserve us in perilous times, to labour to have the experience of the power of every truth in our hearts. 'If so be ye have learned the Lord Jesus.' How? So as to 'put off the old man which is corrupt, according to the lusts of the flesh; and to put on the new man, which after God is renewed in righteousness and holiness;' Eph. iv. 22—24. This is to learn the truth. The great grace that is to be exercised with reference to truth, in such a season as this, is to exemplify it in our hearts, in the power of it. Labour for the experience of the power of every truth in your own hearts and lives.

[3.] Zeal for the truth. Truth is the most proper object for zeal. We ought to 'contend earnestly for the truth once delivered to the saints;' to be willing, as God shall help us, to part with name, and reputation, and to undergo scorn and contempt, all that this world can cast upon us, in giving testimony unto the truth. Every thing that this world counts dear and valuable is to be forsaken, rather than the truth. This was the great end for which Christ came into the world.

(2.) Cleave unto the means that God hath appointed and ordained for your preservation in the truth. I see some are ready to go to sleep, and think themselves not concerned in these things; the Lord awaken their hearts. Keep to the means of preservation in the truth; the present ministry. Bless God for the remainder of a ministry valuing the truth, knowing the truth, sound in the faith; cleave unto them. There is little influence upon the minds of men from this ordinance and institution of God in the great business of the ministry. But know there is something more in it, than that they seem to have better abilities to dispute, than you; more knowledge, more light, better understandings than you. If you know no more in the ministry than this, you will never have benefit by it. They are God's ordinance, the name of God is upon them, God will be sanctified in them. They are God's ordinance for the preservation of the truth.

(3.) Let us carefully remember the faith of them who went before us in this nation, in the profession of the last age. I am apt to think there was not a more glorious profession for a thousand years upon the face of the earth, than was among the professors of the last age in this nation. And pray what faith were they of? Were they half Arminian,

and half Socinian; half Papist, and half I know not what? Remember how zealous they were for the truth; how little their holy souls would have borne with those public defections from the doctrine of truth, which we see, and do not mourn over, but make nothing of in the days wherein we live. God was with them, and they lived to his glory, and died in peace, 'whose faith follow,' and example pursue, and remember the faith they lived and died in. Look round about and see, whether any of the new creeds have produced a new holiness to exceed theirs.

III. A third thing that makes a perilous season is, professors mixing themselves with the world, and learning their manners. And if the other perilous seasons are come upon us, this is come upon us also. This was the foundation and spring of the first perilous season that was in the world, that first brought in a deluge of sin, and then a deluge of misery. It was the beginning of the first public apostacy of the church, which issued in the severest mark of God's displeasure. Gen. vi. 2. 'The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose.' This is but one instance of the church of God, the sons of God, professors mixing themselves with the world; this was not all, that they took to themselves wives, but this was an instance the Holy Ghost gives, that the church in those days did degenerate and mix itself with the world. What is the end of mixing themselves in this manner with the world? Psal. cvi. 35. 'They mingled themselves with the nations.' And what then? 'And learned their manners.' If any thing under heaven will make a season perilous, this will do it; when we mingle ourselves with the world, and learn their manners.

There are two things I shall speak to on this head: 1. Wherein professors do mingle themselves with the world; 2. The danger of it.

1. Professors mingle themselves with the world, in that wherein it is the world, which is proper to the world. That which is more eminently and visibly of the devil, professors do not so soon mingle themselves withal; but in that wherein it is the world, in its own colours. As in corrupt communication, which is the spirit of the world, the extract and fruit of vanity of mind, that wherewith the world is corrupted, and doth corrupt. An evil, rotten kind of communication,

whereby the manners of the world are corrupted; this comes from the spirit of the world: the devil hath his hand in all these things; but it is the world and the spirit of the world that is in corrupt communication. And how hath this spread itself among professors! Light, vain, foolish communication, to spend a man's whole life therein; not upon this or that occasion, but almost always, and upon all occasions everywhere. Vain habits and attire of the world is another instance. The habits and attire of the world, are the things wherein the world doth design to shew itself what it is. Men may read what the world is by evident characters in the habits and attire that it wears. They are blind that cannot read vanity, folly, uncleanness, luxury in the attire the world putteth upon itself. The declension of professors in imitating the ways of the world in their habits and garb, makes a season perilous: it is a mixture wherein we learn their manners, and the judgments of God will ensue upon it. In this likewise we are grown like the world, that upon all occasions we are as regardless of the sins of the world, and as little troubled with them, as others are. Lot lived in Sodom, but 'his righteous soul was vexed with their ungodly deeds and speeches.' Live we where we will, when are our souls vexed, that we do not pass through the things of the world, the greatest abominations, with the frame of spirit that the world itself doth? Not to speak of voluptuousness of living, and other things that attend this woful mixture with the world, that professors have made in the days wherein we live, corrupt communication, gaiety of attire, senselessness of the sins and abominations of the world round about us, are almost as much upon professors, as upon the world. We have mixed ourselves with the people, and have learned their manners. But,

2. Such a season is dangerous, because the sins of professors in it lie directly contrary to the whole design of the mediation of Christ in this world. Christ 'gave himself for us, that he might purge us from dead works, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people;' Tit. ii. 14. 'Ye are a royal nation, a peculiar people.' Christ hath brought the hatred of the devil and all the world upon him and against him, for taking a people out of the world, and making them a peculiar people to himself; and their throwing themselves upon the world again,

is the greatest contempt that can be put upon Jesus Christ. He gave his life, and shed his blood, to recover us from the world, and we throw ourselves in again. How easy were it to shew, that this is an inlet to all other sins and abominations, and that for which I verily think the indignation and displeasure of God will soonest discover itself against professors and churches in this day. If we will not be differenced from the world in our ways, we shall not long be differenced from them in our privileges. If we are the same in our walkings, we shall be so in our worship, or have none at all.

As to our duty in such a perilous season, let me leave three cautions with you, and the Lord fix them upon your hearts.

(1.) The profession of religion, and the performance of duties, under a world-like conversation, are nothing but a sophistical means to lead men blindfold into hell. We must not speak little things in such a great cause.

(2.) If you will be like the world, you must take the world's lot. It will go with you as it goes with the world. Inquire and see in the whole book of God, how it will go with the world, what God's thoughts are of the world, whether it saith not, if it lies in wickedness, it shall come to judgment, and that the curse of God is upon it. If therefore you will be like the world, you must have the world's lot; God will not separate.

(3.) Lastly, Consider we have by this means lost the most glorious cause of truth that ever was in the world. We do not know that there hath been a more glorious cause of truth since the apostles' days, than what God hath committed to his church and people in this nation, for the purity of the doctrine of the truth and ordinances; but we have lost all the beauty and glory of it by this mixture in the world. I verily think it is high time, that the congregations in this city, by their elders and messengers, should consult together how to put a stop to this evil, that hath lost all the glory of our profession. It is a perilous time when professors mix themselves so with the world.

There are other perilous seasons that I thought to have insisted on; but I will but name them.

IV. When there is great attendance on outward duties, but inward, spiritual decays. Now herein, my brethren

(most of this congregation are so in a peculiar manner), I hope, through the goodness of God, in sincerity, though in much weakness, 'Liberavi animam meam.' You know how long I have been treating of the causes and reasons of inward decays, and the means to be used for our recovery: I shall not therefore again insist upon them.

V. Times of persecution are also times of peril.

Now I need not tell you whether these seasons are upon us, or not; it is your duty to inquire into that. Whether there be not an outward retaining of the truth, under a visible prevalency of abominable lusts in the world; whether there be not a proneness to forsake the truth, and seducers at work to draw men off; whether there be not a mingling ourselves with the world, and therein learning their manners; whether there be not inward decays, under the outward performance of duties; and whether many are not suffering under persecution and trouble; judge ye, and act accordingly.

One word of use, and I have done.

Use 1. Let us all be exhorted to endeavour to get our hearts affected with the perils of the day wherein we live. You have heard a poor, weak discourse concerning it, and perhaps it will be quickly forgotten. O, that God would be pleased to give in this grace, that we may find it our duty to endeavour to have our hearts affected with the perils of these seasons! It is not time to be asleep upon the top of a mast in a rough sea, when there are so many devouring dangers round about us. And the better to effect this,

(1.) Consider the present things, and bring them to rule, and see what God's word says of them. We hear this and that story of horrible, prodigious wickedness, and bring it in the next opportunity of talk, and there slightly pass it over. We hear of the judgments of God abroad in the world, and bring them to the same standard of our own imaginations, and there is an end. And so we do with the distresses of others; we talk of them, and there is an end. But, brethren, when you observe any of these things, how it is with the world, if you would have your hearts affected, bring it to the word, and see what God saith of it, speak with God about it, ask and inquire at the mouth of God,

what God saith unto these prodigious wickednesses, and judgments, this coldness that is upon professors, and their mixtures with, and learning the manners of the world. You will never have your hearts affected with it, till you come and speak with God about it, and then you will find them represented in a glass that will make your hearts ache and tremble. And then,

(2.) If you would be sensible of present perilous times, take heed of centring in self. While your greatest concern is self, or the world, all the angels in heaven cannot make you sensible of the peril of the days wherein you live. Whether you pursue riches, or honours, while you centre there, nothing can make you sensible of the perils of the day. Therefore do not centre in self.

(3.) Pray that God would give us grace to be sensible of the perils of the day wherein we live. It may be we have had confidence, that though thousands fall at our right hand, and at our left, yet we shall be able to carry it through. Believe me, it is great grace. Point your private, closet prayers, and your family prayers this way; and the Lord help us to point our public prayers to this thing, that God would make our hearts sensible of the perils of the time whereinto we are fallen in these last days.

Use 2. The next thing is this, that there are two things in a perilous season: The sin of it, and the misery of it. Labour to be sensible of the former, or you will never be sensible of the latter. Though judgments lie at the door, though the heavens be dark over us, and the earth shake under us at this day, and no wise man can see where he can build himself an abiding habitation; we can talk of these things, and hear of other nations soaking in blood, and have tokens of God's displeasure, warnings from heaven above, and the earth beneath, and no man sensible of them. Why? Because they are not sensible of sin, nor ever will be, unless God make them so.

I shall range the sins that we should be sensible of, under three heads: The sins of the poor, wretched, perishing world in the first place; the sins of professors in general in the second place; and our own particular sins and decays in the third place. And let us labour to have our hearts affected with these. It is to no purpose to tell you this and

that judgment is approaching; for your leaders, and those that are upon the watch-tower, to cry, 'A lion, my Lord,' we see a lion. Unless God make our hearts sensible of sin, we shall not be sensible of judgments.

Use 3. Remember there is a special frame of spirit required in us all in such perilous seasons as these are. And what is that? It is a mourning frame of spirit. O, that frame, that jolly frame of spirit that is upon us! The Lord forgive it, the Lord pardon it unto us, and keep us in a humble, broken, mournful frame of spirit: for it is a peculiar grace God looks for at such a time as this is. When he will 'pour out his Spirit,' there will be great mourning together and apart; but now we may say there is no mourning. The Lord help us, we have hard hearts, and dry eyes under the consideration of all these perils that lie before us.

Use 4. Keep up church watch with diligence, and by the rule. When I say rule, I mean the life of it. I have no greater jealousy upon my heart, than that God should withdraw himself from his own institutions, because of the sins of the people, and leave us only the carcase of outward rule and order. What doth God give them for? for their own sakes? No; but that they may be clothing for faith and love, meekness of spirit, and bowels of compassion, watchfulness, and diligence. Take away these, and farewell to all outward rule and order, whatever they are. Keep up a spirit that may live affected with it; get a spirit of church watch, which is not to lie at catch for faults, but diligently, out of pure love and compassion to the souls of men, to watch over them, to wait to do them good all we can. As it was with a poor man, who took a dead body and set it up, and it fell; and he set it up again, and it fell; upon which he cried out, 'Oportet esse aliquid intus,' 'there wants something within' to enliven and quicken it: so is it with church order and rule; set them up as often as you will, they will all fall, if there be not a love to one another, a delighting in the good of one another, 'exhorting one another while it is called to-day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'

Use 5. Reckon upon it, that in such times as these are, all of us will not go free. You find no mention of a perilous

season in Scripture, but it follows, some shall have their faith overthrown, others shall follow pernicious ways, and others shall turn aside. Brethren and sisters, how do you know but you or I may fall? Let us double our watch every one, for the season is come upon us, wherein some of us may fall, and fall so as to smart for it. I do not say we shall perish eternally; God deliver us from going into the pit; but some of us may so fall as to lose a limb, some member or other, and our works will be committed to the fire, that shall burn them all. God hath kindled a fire in Zion that will try all our works; and we shall see in a short time what will become of us.

Use 6. Lastly, take that great rule, which the apostle gives in such times as those wherewith we are concerned: 'Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure.' O, blessed be God for it! 'God knows who are his.'

What then is required on our part? Let him that nameth the name of God depart from evil. Your profession, your privileges, your light will not secure you; you are gone unless every one that nameth the name of Christ departs from all iniquity. What multitudes perish under a profession every day? O, that our hearts could bleed to see poor souls in danger of perishing under the greatest profession!

Will you hear the sum of all? Perilous times and seasons are come upon us, many are wounded already, many have failed, the Lord help us, the crown is fallen from our head, the glory of our profession is gone, the time is short, the judge stands before the door. Take but this one word of counsel, my brethren; 'Watch therefore, that none of these things may come upon you, but that you may escape, and be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of God.'

SERMON XXXIV.*

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF OFFENCES.

Woe unto the world because of offences: for it must needs be that offences come: but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.—Matt. xviii. 7.

It is very evident that our Lord Jesus Christ lays very great weight upon this matter of offences. He represents them like a two-edged sword, that cuts both ways: 'Woe unto the world because of offences: woe to them by whom offences come:' he knits these two things together. It must needs be that there must be offences; God hath appointed it, and it must be so. He doth not merely tell us, it will be; but, it 'must be;' God hath ordered that so it shall be.

I will speak a few things in reference to offences that may be of use unto us; without looking into the depth of this great matter of offence and scandal; than which, I must needs say, I never yet saw any thing less inquired into, though there is no subject more written upon, and spoken to. We should consider for ourselves the time wherein we may be sure offences will abound. It is necessary from this wonderful caution of Christ here given, 'Woe, woe, it must be,' that we should consider the times wherein it is likely offences will abound. And if all those times should prove to be upon us, certainly it is our duty to be wary.

First, The first is a time of persecution. Offences will abound in a time of persecution to the ruin of many professors. So our Saviour tells us, Matt. xiii. 'One received the seed of the word, and it sprang up; but when persecution for the word arose, immediately he was offended.' Woe unto him, he is gone.

Secondly, A time of the abounding of great sins is a time of giving and taking great offence. This the Holy Spirit speaks expressly, that 'in the latter days there shall be perilous times.' All perils arise from offences. And why?

* This sermon was preached Sept. 30, 1681.

Men's lusts shall abound. When there is an abounding of lusts, there will be an abounding of offences, that make the times perilous.

Thirdly, When there is a decay of churches, when they grow cold, and are under decays, it is a time of the abounding of offences: 'Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.' That is a time when offences will abound; such as all the churches of Christ seem to be under at this day. All the virgins, wise and foolish, are asleep. It is what I have told you often, and I wish I could say I have told you without weeping, that we are under woful decays, falling from our first faith, love, and works.

Now if all these times should be upon us: a time of persecution, as it is now throughout the world; saith the apostle, 'Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, for all that befalls you, brethren, in the world:' a time of the abounding of great sin in men; I need not enlarge upon this: and a time of great decays in all churches: if it be thus with us, certainly it is very proper for us to look upon this warning of our Saviour: 'Take heed of offences.'

Offences are of two sorts.

I. Such as are taken only, and not given.

II. Such as are given, and taken also.

I. Such as are taken only, and not given. The great offence taken was at Jesus Christ himself. God appointed Christ to be the greatest offence in the world; Isa. viii. He had designed him to be a stumbling-block, and a rock of offence, an insuperable offence. The poverty of Christ in the world, and his cross were the rock of offence, whereat both Jews and Gentiles stumbled and fell, and ruined themselves unto eternity. Now the apostle disputes, 1 Cor. i. that this was an offence taken, and not given. How does he prove it? Why that wherein God puts forth his wisdom and his power is no offence given, but merely taken. But in Christ crucified God put forth his power. Let him be as poor in the world as he will, let him be crucified, there is the wisdom and the power of God in it, and therefore there can be no just offence.

This offence taken, and not given, is increased by the poverty of the church. You see your calling, brethren; 'not many great, not many wise, not many noble.' In plain

English, you are a company of poor, weak, persecuted people. But saith the apostle, this is no offence given; God chooses the things that are not, to bring to nought things that are. These things are an offence taken, and not given.

II. There are offences given and taken.

1. Offences given: and they are men's public sins, and the miscarriages of professors that are under vows and obligations to honourable obedience. Men may give offence by errors, and miscarriages in churches, and by immoralities in their lives. This was in the sin of David; God would pass by every thing but offence given: 'Because thou hast made my name to be blasphemed,' therefore I will deal so and so. What a talk did it occasion throughout the world? There is your holy man, your godly man, your David, a praying man; do you hear what a noise there is concerning him? 'Thou hast made my name to be blasphemed,' saith God, and this is a great provocation. So God speaks of the people of Israel: these were my people, by reason of you my name is profaned among the Gentiles. These are the people of the Lord; see now they are come into captivity, what a vile people they are. Such things are an offence given.

2. Offences taken: now offences are taken two ways.

(1.) As they occasion grief; and, (2.) Sin. A given offence may be taken either of these ways.

(1.) As they occasion grief. Rom. xiv. See that by thy miscarriage thou 'grieve not thy brother.' Men's offences who are professors, are a grief, trouble, and burden to those who are concerned in the same course of profession. But herein appears the wisdom of God, when he doth in his sovereignty sometimes suffer persons to give offence that may be sanctified unto the great advantage of the church. I am persuaded the church of Corinth was in so much disorder, that it had gone near to have been lost, if God had not suffered one among them to fall into a scandalous sin. But see what the end was. You find in the First Epistle the disorder they were in, and what a scandalous sin fell out among them: and in the Second Epistle, the sorrow upon it; when they knew it, they took offence, and were grieved at it: 'For behold that ye sorrowed after a godly sort; what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea what vehement desire,

yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things,' saith the apostle, 'ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.' I look upon it to have been the greatest sanctified means that God appointed for the humiliation, recovery, and saving of that church, that he suffered in his sovereign wisdom, such an offence to fall out among them. That is the first thing; and let us lay it up in our minds, that we may not be moved and shaken; for I speak with a prospect of what is to come, and not of what is come: 'Offences will come;' and therefore let us remember, that God can sanctify the greatest offences to our humiliation and recovery, and to the saving of our church. Such is his infinite wisdom.

(2.) Given offences occasion sin. There comes the woe, as to the world; for there is no woe from offences to them who are truly humbled for them, grieved at them, and made thereby watchful over themselves and their own ways. But now, when offences are made an occasion of sin, as in the world, the world takes no offence at all by their own sins, nor by the sins of one another. Let them be what they will, let their teachers be as scandalous in their lives as possible, they are not grieved nor concerned: and the reason is in that saying of David, 1 Sam. xxiv. 13. 'As saith the proverb of the ancients,' (it was a saying from the flood, if not from the beginning of the world), 'Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked.' Look for nothing but wickedness from wicked men. So that it is no offence at all to see wicked men do wicked things. They do not take offence at one another; nor doth the church of God take offence; for, as saith the proverb, they can do no otherwise. To shew you how men are hardened in their prejudices against the truth, and confirmed in all their course by offences, would be too long a work for me to declare. But offences given are an occasion of sin, even among professors and believers themselves.

The worst way whereby a given offence is thus taken, is, when men countenance themselves in private sins by others' public sins; and go on in vices because they see such and such commit greater. Woe unto us if we so take offence. Again, a given offence is taken, when our minds are provoked, exasperated, and carried off from a spirit of love and

tenderness towards those that offend, and all others, and when we are discouraged and despond, as though the ways of God would not carry us out. This is to take offence to our disadvantage.

Thus I have shewed you the great weight and import that is to be laid upon this matter of offence, as being the greatest aggravation of sin.

I have shewed you the times wherein offences will abound: a time of persecution; a time of the increase of abominable sins; and a time of the decay of churches; such as are upon us.

I have likewise shewed you, there are offences taken only, and not given: Christ and his cross, the poverty of the church, its persecution and distress in all places, and the hopes and fears of all mankind at present, that it will be ruined. These are offences taken only, and not given, being all suited to the wisdom, goodness, and righteousness of God. There are offences also that are given by outward, known, public sins of persons, who are under evangelical obligations to more honourable obedience. And under this head we might bring in every thing we see or hear, but some more gross than others. And these offences occasion either grief and sorrow; and then they prove a sanctified means in the hand of God for the church's good, making them more watchful and careful for the future: or they occasion sin, both by the world, and by professors; and there comes the woe.

I shall give you a few rules from hence, and so conclude.

Rule 1. The giving offence being a great aggravation of sin, let this rule lie continually in your hearts, That the more public persons are, the more careful they ought to be, that they give no offence either to Jew or Gentile, or to 'the church of Christ.' Why doth the apostle put Jew and Gentile before 'the church of Christ?' Because more evil will ensue upon it, and more disadvantage unto the souls of men. Let this be our rule in walking, especially those of us whose occasions do call us unto more converse in the world, let us always endeavour to give no offence to Jew or Gentile, or to 'the church of God.'

2. If what I have laid down be your first and your main rule, I doubt, where this is neglected, there is want of sincerity; but where it is your principal rule, there is nothing but hypocrisy. Men may walk by this rule, and have corrupt minds, and cherish wickedness in their hearts. If this be the principal rule that guides you, that you will carry it so complyingly, that you will give no offence, this is worse than neglecting the rule in the first case; that argues want of sincerity, this is a certain predominancy of hypocrisy. The principal rule commands conscience to God in all sincerity, and the second, to give no offence; and if we make this our first rule, we are not upright with God. And therefore, let none please themselves that they walk according to rule, if the internal power of God be not found in their souls.

3. Be not afraid of the great multiplication of offences at this day in the world. The truths of the gospel and holiness have broke through a thousand times more offences. They have broke through heresies, and blasphemies, and poverty, and persecution. God hath still preserved his people, who have broke through, and got the conquest over the greatest offences: over offences taken, in the cross of Christ, in the poverty of Christ, in persons that have preached the gospel, and in those who have professed it: over offences given, in innumerable swarms of blasphemous heretics who have professed the name of Christ from the beginning; in false reports that have been cast upon Christians, being reported generally throughout the world, to be a vile generation of wicked persons. The truth and grace of God hath conquered all these offences, and prevailed over them all, and will do so again, if we keep close unto truth, and the power of religion.

4. Beg of God wisdom to manage yourselves under offences: and of all things take heed of that great evil which professors have been very apt to run into; I mean, to receive and promote reports of offence among themselves, taking hold of the least colour or pretence to report such things as are matter of offence, and give advantage to the world. Take heed of this, it is the design of the devil to load professors with false reports. And if so, he is not a wise man,

nor she a wise woman, that stand not upon their guard, when they see an engine the devil often makes use of, who, when he hath raised false reports, and wounded divers, is greatly pleased, and careth not if afterward they be discovered to be false, as knowing that he hath done his work; for hereby he hath drawn out and imbittered the spirits of men one against another. And therefore stand upon your guard, and know it is the devil's engine, though you see not his hand in the managing of it.

SERMON XXXV.*

CHRIST'S PASTORAL CARE.

Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.—MICAH vii. 14.

IT is not much I shall offer unto you from these words; yet I cannot give you a right apprehension of the mind of God in them, and what I intend from them, without a little going over the chapter from the beginning. 'Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits,' &c. ver. 1. When the prophet says, 'Woe is me,' he speaks in the name of the earth, say some, as it was the seat of the church of God: I rather take it to be in the name of the church of God, of those who were truly so, in the midst of a profane, but outwardly professing people. And this lamentation is with a prospect and view of the sin which was in the people, and of the misery which was coming upon them. They have both of them ever been matter of lamentation unto all that truly fear God. They cannot consider the sins and the miseries of an outwardly professing people, but every one of them ought to cry, Woe is me; sorrow is to me; sadness of heart is to me. In respect of sin David saith, Psal. cxix. 136. 'Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.' And in respect of misery and judgments, Jeremiah expresses his sense thus, chap. ix. 1. 'O that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.' The prophet foreseeing both these, an overflowing of sin, and an overflowing of judgment, had reason to cry, 'Woe is me,' it is a lamentation unto me.

He gives an account of the state of the professing, visible church, which he looks upon to be like unto a field or a vineyard after the harvest is past, and the vintage over: 'I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage:' there is no cluster to eat: my soul desireth the first ripe fruit. His prayer was, that

* This sermon was preached October 16, 1673.

they might be a fruitful vineyard unto God; but, saith he, we are just as when the vintage is over, there are some grapes, some clusters left under the leaves, but the principal are taken off: and not only so, but when a field is reaped, or a vineyard gathered, the owner leaves it for a season, takes down the fence, and the beasts come in and prey upon it, until the time of culture and tillage is come again. God never leaves a professing church to be a wilderness, unless upon the utmost apostacy; but he many times leaves them to be as a field after harvest, or a vineyard after the vintage. God will leave Babylon to be as a wilderness, that shall never be tilled any more, shall have no rain, no fences, no tillage: but he will not leave his church so, unless the utmost apostacy come. In like manner, when a man hath gathered in his corn out of the field, you would think he had thrown off all his care about it, the fence is broken down, and the beasts come in; it lies in common, men ride over it, and trample upon it, and he lets it alone: but when the time of culture is come again, the man makes up his fence, drives out the cattle, tills the ground again, and sows it with good seed, that it may bring forth good fruit. So God deals frequently with his church. He dealt so with them here. He takes down the hedge, he suffers the wild beasts to come in, lets persons spoil at their pleasure: but there will come a time of culture again, when he will have fruit brought forth unto his praise.

In ver. 2. the prophet refers the evil he complained of, unto two heads: First, That those who were good were very few; and, Secondly, That those who were evil were very bad. 'The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.' This phrase, 'The good man is perished out of the earth,' is not that the good man perisheth, but that he is taken away, and the earth hath lost the benefit and advantage which it had by him. The same expression is used, Isa. lvii. 1. 'The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and the merciful men are taken away.' And, Psal. xii. 1. 'The godly man ceaseth, the faithful fail from among the children of men.

From hence therefore we may observe, that when the good are very few, and the bad are very bad, inevitable de-

struction lies at the door of that place or nation. If either of these be otherwise, there is yet hope. If there had been but ten good men in Sodom, it had been spared. If the sin of the Amorites had not been come to the full, they had not been ruined. If the good therefore are not very few, or the bad very bad, there is yet hope; but where both concur in a professing nation, as in this, which was the visible church of God, unavoidable destruction is at the door, there is neither hope nor recovery: and therefore, they that endeavour to make men good, to increase the number of the good, they do not only endeavour to save their own souls, but they endeavour to save the nation from ruin. And we will place our plea and our cause there, wherein we are engaged in this world, against the world, and those that do reproach us, that our design is to save the nation as far as we are able; for it is to increase the number of the good, to convert men unto God, the consequence of which is to preserve the nation: and it will at last be found, that they who are useful herein, do more for the preservation of the nation, than armies or navies can do. But when the prophet says, 'The good man perisheth, and there is none upright among men,' it is an hyperbolical expression, intimating, that there are but few that are either good or upright.

From the description of the other part of men, you may observe two things: First, The instance of their sin; Secondly, The manner of the prosecution of it. The instance of their sin was blood; which word comprises all violence, oppression, cruelty, and persecution: and the way of prosecuting this evil is with much diligence and great endeavours: 'They lie in wait for blood; and they hunt every man his brother.' Or, as it is expressed, ver. 3. 'They do evil with both hands earnestly.' And where men do lay out all their wisdom, and all their industry and strength in the pursuit of sin, there also destruction lies at the door. When men are slothful, careless, negligent, sensual in all other things; but industrious only in doing evil, this is another thing the prophet lays down, as a certain sign of approaching destruction.

Having spoken this of the body of the people, he divides them into two parts; the rulers, and the residue of the people: and the rulers he also distributes into three sorts;

the prince, the judge, and the great man. Thus saith he, 'The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward, and the great man uttereth his mischievous desire;' ver. 3. I shall not particularly open these words, but this is what the prophet would teach us: that when there is, as it were, a conspiracy in all sorts of rulers to commit the same iniquity, and to wrap up the whole business by agreement among themselves; so that there is none to intercede, none to stand in the gap, none to do otherwise; that lies in a tendency to those judgments which he will afterward declare. And this was the state of affairs at that time: for this prophecy was given in the days of Ahaz; and there was a great agreement and conspiracy among all in power then to oppress, and to carry on their own covetous and mischievous desires, as they could: they agreed together, and so wrapt it up.

In ver. 4. he speaks as to the residue of the people: 'The best of them,' saith he, 'is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge.' The prophet, after he had laid so great a charge upon them, seems to reflect upon some that made a great pretence of friendliness to the church of God, pretending they would be a hedge, a fence unto it; but, saith he, they prove 'briers and a thorn-hedge.' This hypocritical part of the nation, who speak so fair, and make such a mighty appearance of friendship, yet when a man presses upon them, tear and rend him, and give him nothing but trouble and vexation; whatever pretences they make, there is nothing to be expected from them but what you would look for from briers and thorns. And I observe that the prophet, upon this occasion of dealing with this hypocritical part of the people, doth insert a threatening as though the judgment should fall more upon them, than those whose open wickedness he had before described. Therefore, 'the day of thy watchmen, and thy visitation cometh:' that is, the day which the watchmen had so often declared would come upon them, for their false and hypocritical dealing with God: 'now shall be their perplexity.' When false professors make a specious pretence to relieve the church, but really neither design nor effect any thing for them, but farther vexation and rending; the day of the watchmen is then at hand.

In the 5th and 6th verses, he sheweth that this universal

corruption that was among the people had extended itself to all sorts of relations, that there was nothing of confidence left even among relations. 'Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.' It is a sign of extreme confusion when disorder breaks in among relations, and all grounds of confidence between them are taken away. But this place is applied by our Saviour particularly unto the time of persecution for the gospel, Luke xii. 53. Matt. x. 35, 36. There is no wilderness doth so debauch the nature of man, and break off all confidence in the nearest and strongest relations, as an enmity to godliness and persecution thereon. When once they are engaged in this, then, saith our Saviour, it shall be so and so.

This being the state and condition of the people of the land, the prophet makes in the name of the church a threefold application of himself; first to God, ver. 7. secondly, to her enemies, ver. 8. 10. and thirdly, to himself, ver. 9.

First, Upon the prospect of this state and condition, he makes application to God: 'Therefore, I will look unto the Lord,' saith he, 'I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me;' ver. 7. When all things are in confusion, and at a loss, the people of God are not discouraged from looking unto God; yea, they are encouraged thereunto; and it is made necessary for them so to do. And in such a season not to be looking peculiarly unto God, is an evidence of a heart insensible of the state and condition of the church of God.

Secondly, The prophet, in the name of the church, applies himself unto her enemies; 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her, which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eyes shall behold her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets;' ver. 8. 10.

We may observe here,

1. Who this enemyis; 'She that is mine enemy.' Some

say one thing, some another. Certainly it is some false church, it may be Babylon, or Samaria, or the false professors among themselves. But as Samaria was not yet carried captive, I take it most probably to be the false worshippers of Dan and Bethel, the false church that dwelt in the same land with them. There is no enemy to the true church of God like the false church.

2. Wherein this her enemy did shew her enmity. He doth not speak of those enemies that outwardly wasted and destroyed them, but of that enemy which said unto her, 'Where is now the Lord thy God?' That enemy which reproached them with their profession of faith in God, their nearness unto God, and of God's accepting of them, which is the reproach of the false church continually. Others that are open heathens do not think so much of it; but the false church's reproach usually is, 'Where is the Lord your God?' Where are your prayers and waitings upon God? Where is your confidence in him?

3. She intimates that there was some countenance in her present state and condition, through the providence of God, given to the enemy, thus to reproach her; 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall.' There is a fall that gives countenance to this enemy so to reproach her. But to all these reproaches she opposes her confidence in God; 'My God will save me.' And she comforts herself, that the time was coming, when God would certainly destroy this enemy of his church; this enemy, that is, any church of false worshippers, who reproach the church of God under their straits and difficulties with former trusting and confidence in God.

Thirdly, He applies to himself, personating the church, ver. 9. 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him,' &c. Here is a very becoming frame under the present state of affliction; a deep humiliation for sin, and a quiet submission to the corrections of God's hand; but at the same time here is expressed the firm resolution of faith, to wait till God should plead her cause, and execute judgment on her enemies; there seems to be the utmost confidence in this case; 'He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.'

The issue of the whole of this prophecy, is the deliverance

of the church, and that restoration which was accomplished in part in the deliverance of this people a long while after out of captivity. 'In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria,' &c. All the people that have been scattered about shall be gathered to Zion, to worship God in his temple; ver. 11, 12. But when he had said this, he doth, as it were, correct himself. Ay, but stay, that is not yet to come, ver. 13. 'Notwithstanding,' saith he, 'the land shall be desolate, because of them which dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.' As if he had said, Notwithstanding all this, though God hath thoughts and a purpose of mercy for his own, hidden, secret people; yet there is a time when he will by no means turn away the judgments that are due unto the provocations of the generality of professors. God will indeed do all these things for his church in the appointed time; but 'notwithstanding the land shall be desolate,' there is no avoiding that. The description of things given before is such, that there is no issuing of it but in the desolation of the land; because of the wickedness of them that dwell therein, and for the fruit of their doings.

I have made these short observations upon this part of the chapter to give you the state of things here represented. The land was full of sin, and of horrible provocations of God amongst all sorts of people, from the highest to the lowest. The people of God secretly complain hereof, and bear it as their burden, and tremble at the thoughts of judgments approaching. God had irrevocably, irrecoverably decreed desolation upon the whole land. Things were so stated, that whatever might be the mercy and goodness of God and his thoughts towards his people, notwithstanding, the land was to be desolate.

In this state and condition, the prophet puts up this request; 'Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.'

The observation I shall make from the words is this:

Observation. In the most calamitous season, in the greatest inundation of sin and judgment, under the unavoidable-

ness of public judgments, there is yet ground for faith to plead with God for the preservation, safety, and deliverance of his people.

All these things are here laid down: a calamitous season; an inundation of sin and judgment; and an irrecoverable purpose of God to destroy the land: yet faith, I say, hath ground in this state and condition to plead with God for the preservation and protection of his own secret people. You will say, This is no great matter. It may be we have heard arguments that God will preserve them, and deliver them; and have heard the time computed, when God will deliver them, and could say amen to it. But it is to no purpose to go farther in teaching, than in endeavours to raise up our faith and believing. I confess I can go no farther than this, that I have ground for duty; and to leave all the rest to God's sovereignty. If God should inevitably decree to destroy this nation, yet we have ground for faith to plead with God for the preservation and deliverance of his own inheritance.

I shall go no farther than the text to prove it; for the opening the text, and the proof of the doctrine will be one and the same.

In the words we have,

I. What is prayed for, what the prophet pleads for; and that is, 'Feed thy people with thy rod.'

II. There are the arguments of faith the prophet pleads in this condition, when God had inevitably decreed desolation to the whole land; and these are four: 1. That they were God's people; 'Feed thy people.' 2. That they were the flock of his heritage; 'Feed thy people, the flock of thine heritage.' 3. That they 'dwelt solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.' 4. That God had in former days 'fed them in Bashan and Gilead.'

I shall briefly handle these things, and both shew you what is prayed for, and what in these arguments faith hath to plead in such a condition. For though God may say concerning a nation, Plead no more for it; yet he never saith so concerning his own people.

I. We shall consider what the prophet here prays for; which is, that God would feed his people with his rod. 'Feed thy people with thy rod.' God is here compared to a

shepherd; and it is a relation that he doth very frequently in Scripture take to himself; and you know what a large field I have to walk in, if I would insist upon the allusion. God is a shepherd, and Christ is a shepherd; therefore he saith, 'Feed thy people with thy rod.' The word שבט here used sometimes is put for a sceptre, wherewith kings rule; sometimes for a staff; and sometimes for a rod. It was the instrument, whatever it was, that shepherds used in those days. It is mentioned, Psal. xxiii. which is a great description of God, as a shepherd; 'Thy rod and thy staff;' the same word as here. God, as a shepherd, rules his people with a rod, which they used both for direction and correction. He will not strike his sheep with great and violent instruments to break their bones, to destroy them; but he makes them know he hath a rod in his hand. But I take it, that this rod was principally for the direction of the flock; and he prays that God would 'feed them with his rod.' Truly we have reason to consider what is in this word, because I think here is a rule of faith given us what we are to pray for the people of God, in such a day as we have described. The great thing we are to pray for now, is, that God would 'feed them;' not that God would make them kings, and rulers, and great men, and give them the necks of their enemies to tread upon, and such kind of things; but when things are thus, saith he, your prayer should be, that God would 'feed them.' There are three things in this feeding of God's people.

1. That God would supply their spiritual and temporal wants, that they may be preserved from great distresses: this is in the word. Rev. xii. 6. 'The woman fled into the wilderness, and God fed her there.' While the woman was in the wilderness, she was preserved with such spiritual and temporal supplies, as kept her from destroying distresses. This we may pray for, this we have a rule for, when we fear inevitable desolation is approaching upon a nation: God allows us to pray, and gives us a ground of faith to pray, that for his own people he would provide spiritual and temporal supplies, so as they may be kept from great distress.

2. There is in this feeding of them as a shepherd, that God, in that state which is coming upon them, would give them pledges, singular pledges of his own tenderness and love. It is so said of Christ under the like comparison,

Isa. xl. 11. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.' How is that? 'He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.' We have this in the rule of faith for prayer at this day, that God would deal with all believers of all sorts according to their weakness, and according to their wants; that when the day of visitation, and the day of perplexity comes upon the world, Christ in a way of feeding would suit himself to every one's condition. Some may be more able to be driven before, others must be carried in his arms, and in his bosom. We must pray therefore, that he will deal with every one of them according to their state and condition.

3. By feeding is intended rule, protection, deliverance; present rule and protection, and deliverance in God's appointed time. It is not for a shepherd merely to carry his flock into good pasture; but he is to take care to preserve them from all evil, whereunto they are exposed. David, that great shepherd, who was a type of Christ, gives this account of himself: 'I was a shepherd, and I kept my father's sheep; and there came out a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I followed him, and smote him; and when he rose up against me, I took him by the beard and slew him;' 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35. This was part of David's care as a shepherd over his sheep. Feeding is ruling in the word here used: and chap. v. 4. it manifestly intends rule and protection: 'He shall stand and feed' or rule 'in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall abide.' It is such a feeding of Christ in the majesty and in the power of God, as his people shall be preserved by. We have therefore in our rule particularly this comprised, thus far we may go; necessary supplies of spiritual and temporal, inward and outward mercies; grace and mercy towards all, according as their state and condition doth require; to the weak, diseased, those that are great with young, protection and powerful deliverance in God's good time.

This is the first thing, What it is we have a rule to pray for, even in the most calamitous season, and when inevitable destruction is decreed against a place or nation.

II. Let us now consider the arguments of faith to be

pleaded in this case, which our text affords. And these, as I have said, are four.

I would only first observe of these arguments in general, that there is no one of them taken from any thing of worth, of desert, from any thing of good, nay nor of grace, that is in the people themselves; but they are all taken from God himself, and the relation which they have to God, and what God had formerly done for them. Whatever pleadings or arguings in such a day we may have in our own spirits with God for safety and protection, if they are secretly influenced with thoughts that we are good, and better than others, there is nothing of faith in our arguings. God knows, all the graces and fruits of all believers and professors in this nation considered in themselves, will not make up one argument. But to proceed.

1. The first argument the prophet here uses, is, that they were the people of God: 'Feed thy people.' They were the people of God upon a threefold account, each of which contains an argument.

(1.) They are the people of God upon the account of election. Christ commands the apostle to abide preaching the gospel at Corinth with this argument: 'I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city;' Acts xviii. 10. They were the people of God by election; God had eternally chosen them, and designed them to be converted by the gospel, by the preaching of his ministry.

Will this afford any argument to plead with God? Yes: Luke xviii. 7, 8. 'Shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him; though he tarry long? I tell you he will avenge them speedily.' The argument for vengeance is from his people's being his elect: 'Shall he not avenge his elect?' There is something in God's decree of election and choosing his people, that may be pleaded with him for the highest part of feeding, which is to avenge them of their enemies.

(2.) They are the people of God by purchase and acquisition. This was the great plea under the Old Testament. 'The people of the Lord whom thou hast redeemed with a high hand, and with a stretched out arm:' whom thou hast taken out of the world, and planted for thyself. He made

it his argument to plead with God, because they were his people by purchase and acquisition; 'by a high hand, and by an outstretched arm.' And the argument is grown more strong under the gospel, because they are purchased by the blood of his Son: Rom. viii. 32. 'If God spared not his own Son, but gave him up to death for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' The people we plead for are God's elect people, and he will avenge his elect speedily; they are God's purchased people, and that purchased with the blood of his Son; and will he not together with him give them all things, all necessary things, all things that pertain to life and godliness? Here is ground for faith to plead with God in such a case.

(3.) They are God's people by covenant. This is that which makes up their relation, which is prepared in election, acquisition, purchase, and redemption; but the formal denomination arises from the covenant. Jer. xxxii. 38—40. 'I will make a covenant with them, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God:' that completes the relation. Hosea ii. 23. speaks also to the same purpose.

What arguments arise from hence, that they are the covenant people of God? The sum of all arguments that can be pleaded upon that head, and they are great and many, are all laid down, Luke i. 68, &c. 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us,' &c. 'as he hath spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives.' Here is all we have warrant to pray for; all that is comprised in God's feeding of us. What is the plea and argument for it? God will 'remember his holy covenant, the oath which he hath sworn,' whereby it is established; and hence he will establish us, that we may 'serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life.' A great argument! that those we plead for are God's cove-

nant people. 'Lord, feed thy people,' those that are thine by election, by acquisition and purchase, and those that are thine by covenant, a people that have made a covenant with thee.

2. The next argument is, because they are 'the flock of thine heritage.' There are two things in this argument that we may plead with God: (1.) That they are 'a flock;' (2.) That they are 'the flock of God's heritage.'

(1.) They are 'a flock;' that is, of sheep, wherein these three things are comprised, which are pleadable with God:

[1.] That they are helpless; [2.] Harmless; [3.] Useful. A flock of sheep is so.

[1.] They are helpless. Sheep are poor, helpless creatures; the more of them there are, the more are they exposed unto all manner of rapine and destruction, when left unto themselves. They are poor, helpless creatures. And truly so are the people of God, unless Christ their shepherd be with them. They are and have been a poor, helpless people throughout the whole world. I confess, when Christ their shepherd goes before them, they will go through great difficulties; but of themselves they are altogether helpless.

[2.] They are harmless. So are sheep; and it is required of all the saints of God, that they be so likewise; Phil. ii. 15. 'Be harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.' Let us do the world no harm, neither public nor private; do them no wrong, nor injury; that we may have an argument from hence to plead with God.

[3.] Sheep are useful; and I will name three things (though I love not to pursue allegories) wherein the people of God are useful in the world. 1st. In the secret blessing that goes along with them. 2dly. In the good example they give. 3dly. In their industry in the world.

1st. There is a secret blessing goes along with them; as you see here, chap. v. 7. of this prophecy: 'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst,' or in the bowels 'of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' This poor remnant of Jacob that lies in the bowels of the people, communicates secret blessings to them; this remnant is as the dew that makes them spring; all they have is from this remnant of Jacob in their bowels. But

who sees it? No, saith he, it is not such a dew; 'it tarrieth not for man;' none see the secret way whereby the dew falls; nor those secret ways whereby blessings are communicated to the whole nation from this secret remnant of Jacob, that lies in the bowels of them.

2dly. They are useful from the good example they give; walking in the world as becomes creatures made to the glory of God. Tit. iii. 8.' This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men.' Not only unto them who are relieved by them, but unto all mankind it is profitable. When professors are diligent and fruitful in good works, all mankind is profited by their example.

3dly. They are profitable and useful in the world by their industry in it. Tit. iii. 14. 'Let ours also learn to maintain good works,' to profess honest trades, 'for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful:' useful to the world by their 'industry in their honest trades;' the words may be well rendered so, and it is so in the margin of your Bibles. Many others help only to consume the fruits of the earth in luxury and wantonness; but God gives these an industry in their honest callings. Here is argument in this, that this flock is helpless, harmless, fruitful, useful. But,

(2.) The main of this argument lies upon the adjunct. Saith he, 'Feed the flock of thine heritage.' This flock is God's heritage. Deut. xxxii. 9. 'The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.' Why the lot of his inheritance? When the people came to possess the land, it was divided to them all by lot. God hath his lot in the world. That which, if I may so say, is fallen to God's share, is this flock; and Christ rejoices in it, Psal. xvi. 5, 6. 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage.' His lot was cast in Canaan, in a good and fruitful place. Christ takes a view of his church, and is satisfied with it. I desire no more, saith he, 'The lines are fallen to me in a pleasant place,' this my lot is a 'goodly heritage.'

And these things may be pleaded from this, that they are 'the flock of God's heritage:'

[1.] It being God's heritage, if he take not care of it, no-

body else will. Every man takes care of his own heritage, that which belongs to him; and if God take not care of his, there is none else to care for them. It is frequently so expressed, that they are such as none care for. Why? It is not their heritage. It is not the heritage of princes, and great men of the world; of the Turk, or the pope. As therefore it is God's heritage, if he will not take care of it, it is in vain to expect it from any other.

[2.] It is the heritage of him whom the whole world looks upon to be their greatest enemy. The whole world is at enmity against God: and you see the state of things in the world; every one's design is to destroy the heritage of his enemy. As long as the world continues in this enmity against God, its whole design is to destroy his heritage. Look upon the nations abroad in all their agitations, their main design is to ruin this heritage, because it is God's, against whom they maintain enmity in their hearts, worship, and ways. If therefore God doth not take care of his own heritage, it will certainly be destroyed, because his.

[3.] This argument may also be pleaded: if this flock be the lot of God's heritage, then take it away, and the whole world is hell. If God's lot be out, if this remnant be destroyed, let men make things as fine as they will, adorn their dungeons as much as they please, it is all but hell.

These are the arguments that may be pleaded with God from this: 'Feed thy people,' and 'the flock of thy heritage.' It is a poor, helpless, harmless flock, yet useful to the glory of God, and the good of men. It is God's heritage, if he minds it not, none will; and if it be taken out of the earth, it will presently become a hell. This is the second argument in the text for faith to plead with God.

3. The third argument is taken from their state and condition: 'That they dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.' The first argument pleads God's glory, his love, and faithfulness: 'Thy people' in covenant. The second argument pleads God's interest: 'The flock of thy heritage.' This third argument pleads God's pity and compassion; 'Which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.' Every word hath argument in it to plead with God in this case.

(1.) They 'dwell solitarily;' that is, disconsolately. It

is a poor disconsolate flock, that dwells separate from relief. This takes in two things: Inward disconsolation from themselves, and their own fears and distresses; and outward helplessness. They are where none comes at them to relieve them. It is a great plea, the solitariness of God's flock, with the compassion and mercy of God for their relief. It may be, through our peace and plenty, and such things as we enjoy, we are not so sensible of the efficacy of this argument; but the Lord knows, and many of his understand, how strong a plea it is with God upon that account: we are a poor solitary people, comfortless within, and helpless without.

(2.) As they 'dwell solitarily;' so 'in the wood;' that is, in a dark and entangled condition. They are not only solitary, disconsolate, and helpless; but they are in the dark, see not their way, and so in danger to wander; and if they are out of the certain path, the wild beasts of the forest are ready to devour them. There is nothing harder with the people of God at this day, than that they are in the wood, where it is difficult to find their way. The Lord make them careful, and to see the steps of their shepherd going before them, that they may not wander, and so be exposed to the wild beasts that are ready to devour them.

(3.) Another plea is from the place where this wood is: it is 'in the midst of Carmel.' Though there was a particular place so called, yet the word is a common name for a a fruitful field for feeding: the country or nation where they lived was such. Some think this hath relation to Babylon, which was very fruitful unto the inhabitants of it; yet the poor remnant dwelt in the wood, in the midst of Carmel. The Jews did so. Nehemiah gives us a most pathetical description of their state, chap. ix. 36, 37. 'Behold, we are servants this day; and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it. And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us, because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.' This people 'dwelt in the wood, in the midst of Carmel,' a land good and pleasant, yet they were in a distressed condition.

(4.) There is yet another plea in it for mercy: that they

are not only solitary for a little season, entered into the wood; but they dwell in this solitary condition, have been long in it, and may continue long so; it signifies an abiding or continuing in that state. This argument, as I told you, respects the pity, the bowels of God, his compassion and tenderness, when his poor people shall dwell and abide long solitary, in an entangled, perplexed condition, as in a wood, in the midst of a fruitful land, that God had given their fathers. It is so at this day with many of God's people; and it is a great plea for mercy and compassion.

4. There is one argument more in the words, which I shall but name, and I have done. 'Let them feed,' saith he, 'in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.' Bashan and Gilead were places of very fruitful pasture. Whence the children of Reuben and Gad desired Moses, that they might have their possession in Gilead, and in the kingdom of Bashan; 'because,' say they, 'it is a place for cattle, and thy servants have much cattle.' It was a fruitful place where their flocks were well fed and nourished.

Where lies the argument here? It is fetched from former experiences of what God had done. It is from God's faithfulness grounded upon former experience. We have seen what God can do, how he hath brought his people out of straits, and carried them through difficulties, and delivered them out of troubles, and fed them in Bashan, and in the land of Gilead: which is made an argument, that he would feed them so again.

I might press this argument farther; but I shall offer nothing more at present; and I think what I have said is not unseasonable. We have seen the state of things laid before us, that we have a rule of faith what to pray for in such a day, that God would feed his people. We have shewed you what is contained therein, and have gone over briefly those arguments that may be pleaded with God in such a case, reserving the time and season unto his own sovereignty.

SERMON XXXVI.*

THE BEAUTY AND STRENGTH OF ZION.

Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.—PSAL. xlviii. 12—14.

MANY expositors think this psalm to be an ἐπινίκιον, a triumphant song of thanksgiving after some great deliverance at Jerusalem. Some apply it to the times of Asa, when Zerah and the Ethiopians came with an army against Jerusalem of ten hundred thousand men. Others apply it to the times of Jehosaphat, when the Moabites, and Amonites, and mount Seir the Edomites, were gathered together against Judah. And others again to the days of Hezekiah, when Sennacherib and his army came against Jerusalem and were destroyed. They ground their interpretation upon ver. 4—6. 'Lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it' (but they could come no farther), 'and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail:' which is a description of some great consternation that befell the enemies of God, and the enemies of Jerusalem, when they drew near unto it. So the Jews do interpret these verses: 'Walk about Zion, and go round about her, tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces:' that notwithstanding this great and dreadful attempt, whether by the Ethiopians, or by the Moabites, or Sennacherib, there is not one tower broken down of Zion or of Jerusalem, but all things are safe and well. For my own part, I should rather judge this psalm to be composed by David, and purely mystical and prophetical. It is easy to manifest that all the foregoing psalms are so. And the close of the former psalm is the calling of the Gentiles, where he saith, 'God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holi-

* This sermon was preached April 22, 1675.

ness;' ver. 8. And in ver. 9. you read in the margin of your bibles, better than in the text: 'The voluntary of the people are gathered unto the people of the God of Abraham.' The people were become a willing people in the day of his power. However, all conclude that these words are a graphical description of the defence that God will at all times give his church, which the psalmist doth set before our eyes.

Look upon it, and observe what a diligent view he requires to be taken of what he here proposes. He looks upon Zion as a well-fortified garrison, not like to be carried in haste by the enemy. And he would have you well consider too, what the fortifications are; therefore he distributes his direction into so many particulars. 'Walk about Zion;' this is the way whereby you may come to see how Zion is fortified. It may be you have gone a little way in walking, and have seen much, but do not cease: 'Go round about her,' see if you can find one weak place, where she is likely to be attacked by the enemy: 'Tell the towers,' cast up the number of them, and see that they are not few; which is what a man of judgment and understanding would do, if he were to take a view of a fortified place, and consider whether it would hold out against a strong enemy: 'Mark ye well her bulwarks;' or, 'set your heart to her bulwarks,' consider them, do not take a general view of these fortifications of Zion, but ponder and consider, whether they are likely to hold out or not, and whether you may put your trust in them: 'Consider her palaces,' which were the great and eminent buildings in and about Zion, called in some place, 'palaces of ivory,' with which they were greatly adorned. So that here is this direction given to take a very strict, sedate, considerate view of the fortifications of Zion; since it would certainly be attacked by great and powerful enemies. There are two things added. One is the particular end wherefore they should do so: 'That ye may tell it to the generation following,' since other ages of the church would have the use of it. The other is the ground why all this would be of benefit to them, and the generations following: 'For this God is our God in covenant, and that for ever and ever, and will be our guide unto death.'

I shall make one observation from the words, and speak a little very briefly and plainly to it.

Observation. A diligent search into, and consideration of, the means and causes of the preservation and protection of the church in the greatest dangers and difficulties, is a duty incumbent on us for our own support against sinful fears, and to enable us to that testimony which is required for future generations, to encourage them to trust in the Lord.

Every age is to give over a good testimony of God's dealing with Zion to the age that comes after. And a diligent search and inquiry into the causes and means of the protection and preservation of the church of God in the midst of imminent dangers and difficulties, is a duty incumbent upon us, that we may be fortified against sinful fears in ourselves, and encourage succeeding generations to trust in the Lord. As we have received the testimony of such who have gone before us, so we are to give our testimony to those who shall come after.

All that I shall do at present is to answer these five questions:

I. What is to be understood by the preservation and protection of the church, so as we may look neither for less nor more than what we are like to meet with?

II. What is meant by searching into, and considering of, these causes and means of the church's preservation? 'Walk about Zion, tell her towers, set your heart to her bulwarks, consider her palaces,' &c.

III. What are those causes and means of the church's preservation, those towers and bulwarks which will not fail, whenever Zerah or Sennacherib comes, or whatever attempts are made upon Zion?

IV. What reason is there why we should thus search into, and consider these causes of the church's preservation and protection?

V. What is the testimony which we have to give concerning this matter to the ensuing generation? 'That ye may declare it to the generation to come.'

I shall speak a little in answer to these five inquiries.

I. What is that preservation and protection of Zion, the church of God, that we may expect, whose causes and means we should inquire into?

This may be reduced unto three heads.

1. The eternal salvation of the church of God. This is

the goal and the prize that all this great running is about in the world. Satan is in his own nature as active and restless, as he is malicious; and yet, I suppose, if this end was taken away, if this was not in his eye, the eternal salvation of the church, of all that believe, he would give himself much more leisure than he doth. All things here, evils, trials, persecutions, and the like, are but skirmishes; but where goes eternal bliss, there goes the victory. This therefore is part of that preservation and safety of Zion which we are to look after; namely, as the apostle saith, 'That all Israel shall be saved.' You have a great security that our Lord Jesus Christ gives of it, John x. 27, &c. 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. I and my Father are one.'

This is the first thing in the church's preservation, namely, that let the conflict be never so great, never so severe, all true believers shall be eternally saved. And if we do not lay the principal weight in our thoughts upon this, our concern in other things will be of no moment unto us. There is one false opinion doth more mischief to the honour of God in the world in this matter, than all the devils in hell are able to do; and that is, of the total and final apostacy of true believers; for if that be so, we have lost our very first principle of the preservation of Zion, namely, that 'all Israel shall be saved,' and that none shall take believers out of the hands of Christ.

2. There is this in it also, that there shall be a church, a professing church preserved in the world throughout all generations, in despite of all the oppositions of Satan and the world; that is, there shall be a called number yielding obedience internally unto Christ, and openly professing that obedience always preserved unto the end of the world. It is expressly included in that promise, Isa. ix. 7. 'Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth and for ever: the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.' However it may fall out in particular places and nations, yet Zion will be preserved, God will reserve for

Jesus Christ a church visibly professing, and yielding obedience unto him according to the gospel.

But you will say perhaps, Where was there such a church in the time of the antichristian apostacy? Did not the visible church wholly fail?

I answer: Though I acknowledge all the churches in the world have greatly apostatized and fallen away; yet, in the first place, all did not fall away in the same length or manner with those in these parts of the world, that were under the antichristian apostacy. There were churches in the east, which though very corrupt formerly, and now more so, yet might justly be esteemed a visible church. Besides, the church of God was then in Babylon, until the reformation. There was in the Roman church a number of persons that sincerely feared God, and belonged unto the Zion of Christ, who were preserved. Hence is that call, Rev. xviii. 4. 'Come out of her, my people.' Christ's people was in her until the time that God gave them a call to come out of her. And another part of them were in visible opposition all along to the growing apostacy of the papacy. About four or five hundred years after Christ, the great composition was made between Christianity and Paganism, when the outward court was given to the Gentiles to be trodden down; that is plainly, when these northern nations, that divided and destroyed the Roman empire, were brought in to be Christians. And upon that composition, nations came in to a profession of Christianity with pagan worship and manners; but yielded obedience unto Christian rulers, bishops, priests, and the like. Now from that very time, when all things sunk into antichristianism, there was still a visible testimony given against it by the church of Christ; that is, by believers from one generation to another, an eminent, blessed testimony against all that cursed apostacy.

It is good to keep our faith and expectation within bounds, that we do not look for more than is like to come to pass; and yet still to have our faith confirmed in those things that may be sure not to fail. 'All Israel shall be saved,' and Christ will maintain his kingdom in the world against all opposition; that the cause wherein we are engaged, whatsoever becomes of our persons, will be triumphant. Believers

shall be saved, and a professing church shall be preserved, which is all the general cause wherein we are engaged. And God, it may be, hath placed us in this age to give over our testimony to the future generation.

3. There belongs to the preservation of the church, the protection and deliverance of the true church of God under persecution: this likewise comes within the compass of these fortifications. We are very apt to look after our own concerns, and it may be to imagine we are more concerned in this third head, than in both the former. But those that think so, make a very wrong judgment; for the measure of all our concerns in present deliverance, or in the conflicts of the church, is to be taken from those two generals, the eternal salvation of the church at last, and the preservation of the kingdom of Christ in the world. And if once we begin to measure them by our own advantages, peace, liberty, or friends, we shall take wrong measures of God's providence, and our own expectation.

There are three seasons, or three ways, whereby churches in particular times and places are in danger of coming short of this protection, or seeming so to do. (1.) When the power of Satan and the world are set upon them in a way of persecution. (2.) When the nations of the world, among whom they live, are so wicked, that God will not forbear a general devastation and destruction. (3.) When themselves apostatize and decay, and provoke God to remove his candlestick from among them. In such seasons it comes to a trial, whether particular churches, or a church in any particular place, shall be preserved and protected in their present trial, or not. And I confess unto you that my thoughts are, that all three are upon us at present, which makes our case the more difficult and hard to be determined. But this, I bless God, I cannot but think, that what we most fear, is least to be feared. It is plain, we most fear the first; and I think I am certain, that the first is least to be feared. I shall speak briefly to each of them.

(1.) As to the first there are two rules whereby to make a judgment of the preservation of the church in time of persecution. The one is that given by the prophet Hosea, chap. xi. 12. Ephraim 'compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God,

and is faithful with the saints.' He prophesies the immediate destruction of Ephraim: the church of Israel shall wander to Assyria, but Judah shall yet abide. Why? 'Judah yet ruleth with God:' that is, for God; the ruling power of Judah is for God. I take that to be the meaning of the words: for if you will observe concerning Judah, all that ever were good among them, was in the ruling power. In the very days of Josiah himself, Judah, that is, the body of the people, turned to God feignedly, and not with their whole heart; Jer. iii. 10. But yet the prophet foresaw a time would come, that Judah should not be so: he shall rule therefore while he is faithful to God. Here then is your rule: while the ruling power of a church or nation is for God, is faithful to God, and his interest, walking with him, they are within these bulwarks. And truly, to speak what I believe in this matter (for in all things that are future, that we may not have clear and full evidence of, there is a reserve for sovereignty), wherever there are churches walking with God, ruling for God, and faithful to him, they shall never be prevailed against by outward persecution in any place, unless it be in subserviency to the hidden design of sovereign wisdom, to remove the gospel wholly from such a place. This then is the second rule, and we can never fathom, and so must be in the dark, whether the church in this or that particular place shall be absolutely preserved; because, if God pleases, he can make the total scattering to be a means subservient to the spreading of the gospel. But so far as they walk with God, they are within this protection.

(2.) The church's danger lies in the destruction that may come upon places where they are, for national sins. There were in the days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, 'good figs at Jerusalem, very good figs, even as the first ripe figs,' Jer. xxiv. 2. that is, there were many precious saints of God: and there were also 'evil figs, so evil that none could eat them:' and yet God puts all these figs into a basket, good and bad, and all must go into captivity. He could no longer forbear for the provoking sins of the nation, the whole must go into captivity together. Now if such a season may come upon any place, as hath upon many nations deservedly because of national sins, the good may suffer with the bad, and churches may receive a scattering.

(3.) The third danger is their own apostacy. There is not any thing in the world that we ought to be more afraid of than of a church's scattering in an apostatizing condition. Then we shall bear the burden of our guilt in our scattering, and be clean taken off from all means of retrieving it. But there is an interest of all particular churches walking with God in this preservation and protection that is here promised and described to be round about Zion; and it is an act of mere sovereignty where God dealeth otherwise with them. That is the preservation and protection of the church in answer to the first inquiry.

II. The second question is, What is it to search after, and consider the causes and means of this preservation? Where shall we look for it?

To this I answer,

1. Be sure to take off your search and consideration from those things which are not, and will not, prove to be the bulwarks of Zion. You know how they were blamed in such a case, Isa. xxii. in a time of great distress and invasion that was coming upon them. The prophet tells you what the people did, ver. 8, &c. 'He discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest. Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many; and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall. Ye made also a ditch between the two walls, for the water of the old pool; but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago.' Looking unto carnal aids and helps in straits and difficulties hath been our folly. The first thing in this call, to look to Zion, is to 'cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils: for whereof is he to be accounted?'

2. Where shall we look for these bulwarks? We must look for the protection of the church, where we look for the destruction of its adversaries. And where shall we look for that? The prophet tells us, Isa. xxxiv. 16. 'Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.' All the foregoing prophecy is concerning the utter destruction of Idumea in

the type, but of Babylon, Rome, antichrist in the antitype. And the verses from 11. to 16. express the gathering of all the fowls of prey, dismal fowls, to dwell in the place. But how shall we know whether this will come to pass? Says the prophet, 'Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read; no one of these shall fail:' that is, no one particular judgment that God hath threatened in his whole book against his adversaries, shall ever fail, no, not in one circumstance: neither the cormorant, nor the screechowl shall want her mate. Seek it out of the book of the Lord; you will find it recorded in these prophecies, and nothing shall fail there; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and the Spirit of the Lord shall accomplish it. We are to look therefore and search for these defences, causes, and means of the protection of Zion, in the book of the Lord. This is 'the tower of David, where hangs a thousand shields, all shields of mighty men,' Cant. iv. 4. where is recorded all the defence of the church and people of God. It is your duty to search in the book of God, and read, to see what are the causes and means of the protection and preservation of the church; and when you have found them out, you are then to consider them. Want of consideration weakens our faith greatly. If you can find by reading in the book of God, that there are such and such defences and bulwarks of Zion; our duty is now to consider whether they will hold out against the greatest attacks and attempts of Satan and all our adversaries. I speak what is plain, but very fit for this day. When you have found out these defences, bring them to the shield of faith, and obedience to God, and consider whether they are like to hold out; consider each, and give judgment upon them. And if you judge they are so, then trust to them; drive all you have, all your concerns within the compass of these fortifications, and trust to them. And this may suffice in answer to the second question; Where are we to search for the preservation and protection of the church?

III. What are the causes and means of the preservation of Zion, and protection of the church, that we are to search out, and to consider and trust unto?

It is but a little I can comply with the text in, I cannot go round about Zion, I cannot tell her towers; but we will consider some of her bulwarks, that will be a sure pre-

servation against all opposition. And I will name four or five unto you.

1. The designation and constitution of Jesus Christ to be king of the church, king of Zion, is the great bulwark of Zion. This is the fort-royal that never fails. Psal. ii. 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.' Notwithstanding all this tumult, conspiracy, and rage, all these counsels and advices, yet, saith he, Zion must stand; for I have set my king, I have anointed Christ my eternal Son to be king upon my holy hill of Zion. But though Christ be made king, it doth not follow but he may give over reigning, and so there will be no security from hence. The truth is, he will do so, he will give over reigning as to his mediatory kingdom; but not before he hath done with all his enemies: Psal. cx. 1. 'Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.' And the apostle, 1 Cor. xv. saith, 'he must reign until all his enemies be subdued.' And when he shall have put down all power and authority, then he shall give up the kingdom. The great security of the church is from hence, that Christ is made king of Zion; and if he be a king he must have subjects. The word is his law, he rules by his Spirit; but rule and law t o gether will not make a kingdom, unless there be subjects to yield obedience. If Christ be a king, if he sit upon Zion, the church must be preserved; for he must have a kingdom. There is but one way in the world that looks probable to put an end to Christ's reign, and that is to cease being his enemies; for the express terms of his reign is, 'till all his enemies be made his footstool.' How easy were it for me to dwell upon this, that this king of the church hath power to preserve it to all ends and in all circumstances; power to preserve it to eternal salvation, in visible profession, or in particular trials. And what king is there among men that will not preserve his subjects in time of trial, when it is in

his power so to do? The Lord Christ will preserve them. 'I give unto them eternal life, and no man shall take them out of my hands. He is able to save them to the utmost, even all that come unto God by him; and he is given to be head over all things to the church,' to dispose of all as seems good unto him, for the end, use, and interest of the church.

This is the first bulwark and security we have for the preservation and protection of the church; and unless men can dethrone Jesus Christ, and cast him off from being king upon the holy hill of Zion, it is in vain to think of prevailing against Zion.

2. The second bulwark of Zion is the promises of God, which are innumerable. I will name but two of them: one is the foundation of the Old Testament, and the other of the New. One held it out for four thousand years, and was never impeached; and the other for these sixteen hundred years, and shall never be shaken.

The promise that was the foundation of the Old Testament, was the first promise of God: Gen. iii. 15. 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' There are these four things in that promise: (1.) That there shall always be a twofold seed in the world, the seed of the serpent, and the seed of the woman; they shall never fail while this world stands. (2.) That these two seeds shall always be at enmity; there shall be an everlasting conflict, from the entrance of sin to the end of it. 'I will put enmity,' saith God, and such an enmity as shall be carried on by the highest and most severe warfare. The enmity is spiritual, but the warfare oftentimes is outward. The first manifestation of this enmity was in blood: Cain slew Abel. Why? Because he was of the evil one. And so it hath been carried on by blood from that day to this. (3.) That either seed hath a leader; there is he and thou, it and thou; that is, Christ and Satan: Christ is the leader of the seed of the woman, the captain and head of it in this great conflict; and Satan as he was the head of the apostacy from God, continues the head of his seed, the generation of vipers, to try out the contest with Christ unto the end. (4.) The victory shall always be to the seed of the woman. It is said indeed,

'Thou shalt bruise his heel.' Christ's heel, in his sufferings, both in his own person, and those of the church. But on the contrary it is said likewise, 'He shall bruise thy head;' break thy power and strength; conquer thee. Then Zion is safe. This was the foundation of the Old Testament: and though things oftentimes were brought to great distress, sometimes by apostacy, and sometimes by persecution; yet this promise carried it, and delivered over the church safe into the hand of Christ.

Now when Christ takes the church, and goes to new form it, and fashion it more for the glory of God, there is the foundation promise made in the New Testament: 'Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;' Matt. xvi. 18. If that obscure promise under the Old Testament did secure Zion as to all those things before mentioned, four thousand years; shall not we trust to this promise of our Saviour for half the time? Though it is indeed the continuance of the same promise; for the gates of hell is the seed of the serpent, and the rock is Christ. That is the second bulwark of Zion. We may be shaken in our faith and confidence, but we have the promise of God, that hath supported it thus far in the world, and will certainly preserve it to the end.

3. There is the watchful providence of God over the church. It is expressed, Deut. xi. 12. where the land of the church is said to be 'a land, which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year unto the end of it.' That land which is the possession of the church, the seat of God's worship, the church itself, is what the Lord careth for. And it is expressed again to the same purpose, Isa. xxvii. 3. where this land is called God's vineyard; 'I the Lord do keep it, and will water it every moment, lest any hurt it; I will keep it night and day.' There is the watchful providence of God over the church night and day preserving it, which providence indeed we live upon, though it is secret and invisible to us. There is power in it, but 'God hides his power.' We see little, we are not able to discern any thing to purpose of the secret emanation of divine power and wisdom through the hearts and counsels of all mankind, to this end, that God

may preserve his church, governing their affections, ruling their thoughts, turning and overturning their counsels, things that will never appear nor come to light, what was their occasion and ends, till the great day, when the thoughts of all hearts shall be discovered. The Lord will keep and preserve his church that none may hurt it.

4. Another bulwark is God's special presence. God is in an especial manner present in his church. I have treated concerning the nature and special presence of God and Christ in the church, and proved it from many promises, and shewed the effect of it, which I shall not now insist upon, but only shew that this is a bulwark of the church. In Isa. viii. 9, 10. there is a gauntlet thrown out to all the adversaries of the people of God, and a challenge to do their worst; 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand.' What is the reason? 'For God is with us.' The presence of God is with his church. Every thing of force, of counsel, of association and agreement, all shall be broken and come to nought, they shall have no effect; and he gives this only reason, 'because God is with us.' While God is with his church, it may be exercised with great trials, so that they may think they have lost the presence of God, as in Judg. vi. 12. 'The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee. Oh my Lord,' saith he, 'If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?' Whence is all this evil come upon us, that we should be under the power of the Midianites, oppressed and destroyed by them? He could not believe that if God was with them according to his promise, they could be so prevailed upon by their enemies. Great things of trouble may befall the church of God, while God is present with them, so as they may be ready to say sometimes, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God, the Lord hath forsaken, my God hath forgotten me.' It cannot be, saith Gideon, that God is with us, if we be thus ruined. But he will appear and manifest himself for the protection of Zion.

5. The last bulwark, unto which all others may be reduced, is the covenant of God: 'For this God is our God.' That God who hath fortified Zion in all other generations, and wrought these deliverances, he is our God in covenant.

I shall not need to reckon any more than these five bulwarks of the church. Ponder and consider whether they are like to work out its preservation and protection. And if God gives us wisdom to single out these things, and consider them aright, we shall soon see what encouragement we have to pray for the preservation and protection of the church, however it may be attacked and attempted, even this day, which is our present business.

IV. Why should we make this inquiry into these causes and means of the preservation and protection of the church?

The reason is, to deliver ourselves from our own sinful fears, and that by a discovery of the great mistake which all the adversaries of the church run upon. The reason why the ground whereupon they attempt the church, is that and no other which you have, Ezek. xxxviii. 10, 11. 'Thus saith the Lord God, It shall come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought; and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages, I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates.' Here is the very ground of the undertaking of the world against the church in any age, that they have no defence, are a poor people, that dwell in unwalled villages, and have neither bars nor gates. It is a miserable disappointment for men to go and undertake to destroy, or oppress any place, thinking they are unprovided, and when they come there, to find it quite otherwise. At this day there would not any move a tongue against the people of God, but, upon this very account, that they have no defence, no protection. And sometimes they proceed so far as that they begin to discover the bulwarks of Zion, if not in the causes, yet in the effects. The old world saw not God in the cause of what he did; but when the waters began to roll upon them, the psalmist tells us, 'they saw it, and were

afraid, and fearfulness took hold upon them.' Is this the people that dwell in unwalled villages, that have neither bars nor gates? See their towers, behold their bulwarks; there is no attacking them. When once God makes them to see this, that the power of Christ is engaged for his people, they will then cry to the mountains and to the rocks to hide them from the day of his wrath; they will be surprised with fear.

Now seeing the adversaries of the church of God are certainly upon this mistake attempting the church, because as they imagine, it hath no guard, and they will certainly find at last that they have a guard which they saw not, and were not acquainted with; why should we be afraid in such a case? Nothing more encourages persons than when they know their enemies do clearly mistake their condition. This is enough to make the veriest coward in the world valiant. Let us be sure to be found within this garrison, and place of defence, and certain that we have to do in the concerns of Zion, and not of the world; and then shall we see the mountains all full of chariots and horses of fire round about us, Christ reigning, the promise of Christ engaged, and the watchful eye of God upon the church continually. Our fears arise from the want of considering these things, and taking a carnal view and measure of things that are seen.

V. The last inquiry is, What testimony are we to give over to the generation that is to come after us?

This testimony consists of two things:

1. The exercise of faith and patience in all our own trials that may befall us, that there may be a remembrance of it in the generations that are to come. The martyrs that suffered here so long ago, do still tell us in this generation by their faith and patience, that Zion had walls and bulwarks round about her, and that God was her God and guide. Had their not believed it, do you think they would have given up their bodies to the flames in this city and other parts of the nation? In like manner that faith and patience which we shall exercise in any trial that may befall us in the behalf of Zion, is to tell the generations to come what God hath done, and how we have found it ourselves.

2. It is our duty to give it over by instruction to those

that we bring up. Our fathers have told us what God did in their days; and we are to give in this testimony to God, to tell our children what God hath done in our days; so long have we lived and been professors; so long have we walked in Zion, and we have found God faithful in his promise. Not one word or tittle hath failed, that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken. Thus are we to instruct the generation that is growing up, that hath not seen those things which we have seen.

SERMON XXXVII.*

THE DIVINE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.—Rom. i. 16.

The preceding verses of this chapter contain a declaration of the person who wrote this epistle; the apostolical authority wherewith it was wrote; and a gracious salutation of them to whom it was wrote. This verse makes an entrance upon the main subject matter designed to be treated on in the whole epistle. So that it is the centre of this glorious part of the Scripture, wherein the first general part of it doth issue, and whereon the remaining part depends.

The church at Rome was planted some while before; but it is altogether uncertain by whom. The wisdom of God foreseeing what abuses would be made of the foundation of that church, hath hid it quite from us; there is nothing in Scripture, nothing in antiquity to intimate by whom the faith was there first preached. Probably it was by some believers of the circumcision, whence those disputes arose, and contentions about the observation of Judaical ceremonies, which the apostle handles and determines, chap. xiv. xv. of this epistle. Hearing of their faith, our apostle, upon whom, as he saith, 'was the care of all the churches,' and to whom 'the ministry of the uncircumcision was in an especial manner committed,' Gal. ii. 7, 8. writes this epistle to them to instruct them in the mystery of the gospel, and confirm them in the faith thereof, and in the worship of God required therein.

To give weight to what he wrote, and commend it to their consideration, he acquaints them with that love and care he had for them, answerable to his duty from whence it did proceed; telling them, ver. 14, 15. that 'he was debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise,

* This sermon was preached May 19, 1670.

and to the unwise; so that as much as in him was, he was ready to preach the gospel to them that were at Rome also.' And hereby he prevented a prejudice and jealousy that might possess their minds, and answers an objection they might make to him about his writing. For they might say in themselves, What makes him a stranger, at so great a distance, interpose in our concerns? Doth he not 'stretch himself beyond his measure,' or 'boast himself in another man's line,' which he affirms in another place he did not? For he was charged with such things. His zeal carrying him out to act for the gospel in a peculiar manner, he was charged to 'exceed his measure,' and 'boast in another man's line.' To obviate this, he tells them, no; I do nothing but what becomes a honest man, discharging a debt the Lord Jesus Christ hath laid upon me by virtue of my call to my office, and my susception of it. 'I am debtor to the Greek, and to the barbarian;' to the wise, and to the unwise. I am called, saith he, to preach the gospel to all sorts of people under heaven; my commission is to 'go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;' Mark xvi. 15. that is, as expounded, Matt. xxviii. 19. 'to all nations,' persons of all nations as I have opportunity. Our Lord Jesus Christ, out of his love and care unto them whom he had redeemed with his blood, that they might be saved, had given the apostles to be theirs; 'all things are yours; Paul is yours, Apollos is yours;' and charged them to preach the gospel to them; so that Acts xx. 26, 27. he saith, 'Now I am free from the blood of all men.' How doth he prove it? 'I have not shunned to declare to them the whole counsel of God.' He frees himself from any surmise that they might have, that he had a design of his own, and sought some advantage to himself in thus interposing in the concerns of the gospel, by telling them he doth but discharge a debt; 'I am a debtor,' saith he. And it is truly and really the wisdom of those who in their several spheres have the dispensation of the gospel committed unto them, to let the people know, that they need not absolutely, whatsoever they do consequentially, count themselves beholden to them for preaching the word; but that indeed our Lord Jesus Christ hath engaged us in a debt, which if, in his name, we pay and discharge, we are sure of a reward; if not he will require it at

our hands. We owe the preaching of the gospel to them that are willing to hear it; and if upon any account we withhold it from them, we do defraud them. 'I am debtor,' saith the apostle. And every one that receiveth the gift and call from Christ is a debtor, and so should esteem himself. I have done nothing, saith he, but engaged in the discharge of the debt which I owe to the souls of men.

But there might likewise arise another objection; if he be so concerned in the publication of the gospel, that he writes an epistle to Rome, the greatest theatre then upon the earth, the head of the empire, and most eminent place in the world. Why did he not come himself and preach it? He returns an answer thereunto, ver. 15. That, saith he, is not at present in my power; I am not my own, I am disposed of by a call of Christ, and guidance of his Spirit; but 'I am ready to come to Rome,' I have a readiness to preach the gospel wheresoever God calls me.

Now that he might not seem to have outbid himself in speaking of going thither to preach the gospel, without considering what it might cost him, he gives them the reason and ground upon which he had so engaged himself to be ready to come to Rome, in the words of the text; 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.'

In the words there are,

First, A general assertion laid down as the ground of what he had before affirmed, and that is in these words: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.'

Secondly, He gives a reason of that assertion, what made him say so; 'I am not ashamed, because the gospel is the power of God;' to which reason he gives a threefold limitation. First, As to the especial end of it; 'The power of God.' Whereunto? For this or that end in the world? No; 'It is the power of God for salvation.' Secondly, He limits it in respect of the object; 'The power of God unto salvation.' To all? No, but 'to every one that believeth;' to all believers, consider them either antecedently to their being made believers, or consequentially having received the word. To others it is foolishness; but to us that believe it is 'the power, and the wisdom of God.' Thirdly, It hath limits as

to the manner of administration: 'To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.' The word 'first' there respects the order of dispensation, and not a priority of efficacy, or excellency. The word was first to be preached to the Jews, as you know, in many places, and that for many ends, not now to be insisted on. This is the design of the words.

I shall for the opening of them inquire into two things: 1. What is intended by the gospel? 2. What is it to be ashamed of the gospel? After which the great reason will ensue of the apostle's assertion: 'Because it is the power of God unto salvation.'

1. What is intended by the gospel? The gospel is taken two ways: (1.) Absolutely, as it is in itself; (2.) Relatively, with reference unto our practice and observance of it.

(1.) Absolutely, and in itself: and so also it is taken two ways:

[1.] Strictly, according to the signification of the word, 'good tidings' for the good tidings of the accomplishment of the promise by the sending of Jesus Christ. The name is taken from Isa. lii. 7. 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that publisheth the good tidings of the gospel.' And in this sense the apostle gives us a description of the gospel, Acts xiii. 32, 33. 'We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again:' sent Christ according to the promise, the tidings of which is strictly the gospel.

[2.] The gospel is taken more largely for all things that were annexed to the accomplishment of the promise, the revelation of truths made there, with all the institutions and ordinances of worship that accompanied it: the whole doctrine and worship of the gospel. The first is what God doth for us in giving Christ; the second is what God requireth of us in faith and obedience, and in the whole worship of the gospel. And this is the common sense wherein this word 'gospel' is taken.

(2.) The gospel may be considered relatively, with reference unto believers: and then it intends our profession of the gospel; which profession consists in the performance

of all gospel duties, when and as they are to be performed by virtue of the command of Christ, which I would desire you to consider and remember; for I can assure you all your concerns in the gospel will be found to depend upon it.

It is in reference unto the gospel in both these senses that the apostle here speaks; as it contains the promise of Christ, the doctrine of the gospel, the worship of God, the institutions therein, and every man's performance of his own duty, according to the rules and commands of Christ in the gospel. This is that which the apostle says 'he was not ashamed of.'

2. What is it to be ashamed of the gospel? Shame in general is a grief, perturbation, and trouble of mind, upon the account of things vile, foolish, or evil, rendering a man (as he thinks), liable to reproach and contempt, working a resolution in him to have no more to do with such things, if once delivered from them. As the prophet Jeremiah, chap. ii. 26. 'A thief is ashamed when he is taken.' Two things befall such a person: fear which respects his punishment; and shame which respects the vileness and reproach of the thing that he is taken in. And shame doth particularly respect honour, esteem, and repute. Hence if you can by any means take off the disrepute of a thing in men's judgment, they are no more ashamed of it. The world hath prevailed to take off among themselves, and within their own compass, the disrepute of as odious sins as can be committed in the world, and men cease thereupon to be ashamed of them. We meet with men that will not at all be ashamed of swearing, cursing, blaspheming, nay of drunkenness, scarce of uncleanness; the wickedness of the world hath taken off the disrepute of them within their own compass: yet take the same men in lying or theft, and it will fill them with shame; not but that the guilt and evil of other sins is as great, it may be greater than these; but these are under a disrepute, and therefore they are thus ashamed.

Now this shame may be considered two ways:

(1.) Objectively, as to the things that in themselves are shameful, though men may be relieved against them, so as not to have any inward shame in their minds. So the

apostle tells us, 1 Thess. ii. 2. That he was 'shamefully entreated at Philippi:' he had all manner of shameful things done unto him. And Acts v. 41. all the apostles together 'rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame.' They suffered shame, but they were not ashamed. Heb. vi. 6. It is said, those apostate backsliders 'put the Son of God to open shame.' They did those things unto him, which in their own nature cast shame upon him; they deserted his worship and ways, as if he was not worthy to be followed. Now our apostle was very far from thinking that nothing of this shame would befall him at Rome; that no shameful thing would befall him. He was led thither bound with a chain, and cast into prison. This is not the shame intended.

(2.) There is shame in the person. And this also may be considered two ways:

[1.] As it merely respects the affections of the mind before mentioned. When persons have a trouble and confusion of mind upon them for any thing wherein they are concerned, as that which is dishonourable, base, vile, or foolish.

[2.] When there are the effects of shame; when men act as though they were ashamed, and will have no more to do with those things wherein they have been engaged, but leave them as if ashamed. It is said of David's soldiers, who had done no shameful thing, but courageously acquitted themselves in the battle against Absalom, but because of David's carriage upon that business, 'They went every one away as men ashamed, that fly in battle.' It may be there is that light and conviction upon most concerning the gospel, that it is impossible for them to be brought into perfect trouble and confusion of mind about it, as though it was a shameful thing; but yet perhaps they will do like men that fly in battle, and are ashamed. And in this sense the word is principally used; for saith Christ, Mark viii. 38. 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of him.' How is that? What will the Lord do? He will not own him, which is called being ashamed of him.

Now this is that which the apostle intends. For the doctrine, saith he, and worship of the gospel, and for my work in preaching and dispensing it, I have neither trouble

of mind, nor will I desert it: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.'

But you will say, What great matter is this? I am persuaded there is not one present, but will be ready to think, that they would be as forward as the apostle in this matter. Ashamed of the gospel of Christ! God forbid. What is there in it, that the apostle thus signally expresses it, that he would not be ashamed? I answer, Pray consider these three things:

1st. The apostle here expresses it with especial reference to his preaching and professing the gospel at Rome. 'I will come to Rome also,' saith he, 'for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.' Now there was at that time at Rome a collection of all the great, wise, and inquiring men of the world. And how did they look upon the gospel and the profession of it? Our apostle tells you, 1 Cor. i. 23. as a foolish, weak, contemptible thing. How did they look upon them that professed it? As the filth and off-scouring of all things; 1 Cor iv. 13. Here is a collection of the rulers of the greatest empire of the world, of all the wise and learned men, and great philosophers, princes of the world, all looking upon this gospel, obedience to it, and the worship of God in it, to be as foolish a thing as ever men engaged in, fit for none but contemptible persons. But, saith the apostle, notwithstanding this, 'I am not ashamed of it.'

And we may observe here, that there was not yet at Rome any actual persecution of the gospel farther than shame and reproach. And the apostle declares by this word, that it is the duty of all men to gather up their spirits to confront present difficulties whatsoever they be. It is loaded now with shame: 'I am not ashamed.' It will come to blood: 'I will not fear my blood.' He expresseth the whole in this which was his present duty. And for a person of those parts, and that learning which he had, to come among all the wise men in the world, to be laughed at as a babbler, as one that came with a foolish thing in his mouth, and to say, 'I am not ashamed:' it was the presence of God with him, as well as a sense of duty that enabled him hereunto.

2dly. To an ingenuous, gracious soul, in all sufferings,

nothing is more grievous than shame. Hence it is reckoned as a great part of the humiliation of Christ, that 'he made himself of no reputation;' Phil. ii. 7, 8. He forewent all the esteem he might have in the world, as the Son of God. And Isa. l. 6. 'He hid not himself from shame.' So Heb. xii. 2. 'He despised the shame.' To be dealt withal as a vile person, as the off-scouring of all things, as the 'filth and dung of the city,' as the word signifies, to be carried before the face of scorners, makes a deeper impression upon gracious and ingenuous spirits, than any thing else which can be well thought of. Therefore it is a great thing that the apostle saith, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel.'

3dly. There is also a figure in the word called 'Litotes,' wherein by a negation of one, the contrary is affirmed, and that emphatically: 'I am not ashamed;' that is, 'I am confident,' it is a thing I glory in, that I make my boast of; I am ready to do and suffer any thing, according to the mind of God, for the gospel, willing to undergo whatsoever God calls me to, or to perform any thing he hath appointed for the gospel.

The opening of these two things will give us ground for our observation from the words, which is this:

Observation. Not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, but to own it, avow it, and profess it, as a thing holy and honourable in all the duties it requires, against all reproaches and persecutions that are in the world, is the indispensable duty of every one who desires to be saved by the gospel.

I shall not produce many testimonies of Scripture to confirm this. But let us all be advised, in such a day as this not to make darkness our refuge, and an unacquaintedness with our duty, our relief; but let us search and see what Christ hath spoken concerning such a day, where there is the profession of the gospel.

I will give you one place to which you may reduce all the rest: Luke ix. 26. 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.' The whole sum of the gospel is comprised in this; the person of Christ, and the words of Christ

The person of Christ takes up the whole work of the promise; and the words take up all the commands and institutions of Christ. We have heard before what it is to be ashamed of them. And what shall be the end of such? 'The Son of man shall be ashamed of them, when he shall come in his own glory, and his Father's glory.' There can be no greater weight put upon words to strike awe and dread into the minds of men. The Son of man who loved us, redeemed us, gave his life for us, shall come again, though now he be absent, and we think things are put off for a season; and then he will inquire into our deportment about the gospel; at which time he will appear in all his own glory, the glory given him upon the account of his doing his Father's will, and the glory of his Father and the holy angels. Certainly, we should be extremely troubled then to hear Christ say, 'I am ashamed of you.' You have the same repeated, Mark viii. 38. Our apostle gives the same great rule, Rom. x. 10. 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness:' there is righteousness, let us rest there, what need we do more? Ay, 'but with the mouth confession is made to salvation:' which confession comprises all the duties the gospel requires, and salvation as indispensably depends upon that, as justification doth upon faith. We cannot be justified without faith, nor can we be saved without confession.

You will say, How can this be?

To clear it to you I shall do three things:

I. I shall shew you what there is in the gospel that we are in danger to be ashamed of, if we look not well to it.

II. How we may be ashamed of it.

III. I shall give you the reasons why we ought not to be ashamed of it.

I. What is there in the gospel that we ought in an especial manner not to be ashamed of?

We ought not to be ashamed of whatever is in an especial manner exposed in the world to shame and contempt. The truth is, we do, or have lived in days, wherein it hath been so far from being a shame to be counted a Christian, that it hath been a shame for a man to be counted no Christian. It hath not been the especial duty of believers to profess the gospel in general, but the common custom of all. The profession of the gospel which many trust to in this

world, is nothing but that conformity to the world which Christ curses. In this sense, no man is ashamed of the gospel.

But there are some things that accompany the gospel which are exposed at all times to contempt and reproach, even where Christ and the gospel are publicly professed; and these we are to take heed not to be ashamed of. I will give you four instances: 1. The special truths of the gospel; 2. The special worship of the gospel; 3. The professors of the gospel; 4. The profession of the gospel according to godliness. These are things men are very apt to be ashamed of, as being all exposed to shame and contempt.

1. There are some especial truths of the gospel that in all seasons are exposed to especial contempt and reproach. Peter, 2 Epist. i. 12. calls it 'the present truth,' which in the primitive times was twofold. The apostle had to do with Jews and Gentiles, and there were two especial truths exposed to contempt and reproach, that he principally insisted upon, and would never forego. With the Gentiles, this was exposed to contempt, reproach, and persecution, that there should be salvation by the cross, 1 Cor. i. 23. it is foolishness to all the Gentiles, saith he, that there should be salvation by the cross. What doth the apostle do, let go this doctrine, and preach some other? No: he tells you, chap. ii. 2. 'he determined to know nothing among them, but Christ, and him crucified.' But when he had to do with Jews, where lay the difference? In addition of Judaical ceremonies unto the worship of God, and some place in justification. Thus, Gal. v. 11. 'If I preach circumcision,' says he, 'why am I persecuted?' That is, if I preach circumcision as they do, they would persecute me no more. Will he do it then? No: Gal. vi. 12. He will not give place; he will preach the cross of Christ, and nothing else; and preach against them, and encourage all to do so.

How shall we know then what are the present truths of the gospel, that we may take care not to be ashamed of them?

I answer in two things:

(1.) The first is, that we must shut our eyes very hard, or all the world will not suffer us to be unacquainted with them. A man must very much hide himself, if he will not

know what the truths of the gospel are that meet with contempt and reproach in the world; for he may hear of them everywhere.

(2.) For a general rule take this: consider the ways and methods God hath proceeded in for the manifestation and declaration of himself, and we shall find whereabouts in the general the truths lie, that we are not to be ashamed of, if we will continue our testimony to God.

[1.] God made a revelation of himself principally in and as the person of the Father, the unity of the divine essence acting in the authority and power of the Father in the creation of the world, in the giving of the law, and the promise of sending Christ. What was the opposition the world made unto that declaration of God? for the world doth never make conjunct opposition to the being of God, but unto the declaration that God makes of himself. While God made that declaration under the Old Testament, what was the opposition that the world made? It was plainly in idolatry and polytheism. They would have many gods, or make gods, till he was grown among them an unknown God. The testimony then which the people of God was to bear, and not be ashamed to give, was, the unity of the divine essence.

[2.] In the fulness of time God sent his Son, and he was immediately declared and manifested in the love and work of the Son, the second person. Where lay the opposition of the world? It lay directly and immediately against the person of Christ, and against his cross; it would not believe that he was the Messiah, but called him 'a glutton, a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.' Wherein then consisted the testimony that believers were to give? Why, it was to the person of the Messiah, the Son of God incarnate, and to the work he had to do. God so revealing and glorifying himself in the incarnation and mediation of the Son, the truths which concerned his person, were those which men ought not peculiarly to be ashamed of, and which the world peculiarly opposed.

[3.] Where the gospel is preached, the whole word of glorifying God is committed to the Holy Ghost: Christ promised to send him to glorify him, to do the work of God in the world, and carry on all the concerns of the covenant. The Father laid the foundation of his own glory; the Son comes, and pro-

fesses he came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him; and promises to send the Holy Ghost to do his will, to accomplish all the concerns of the covenant of grace. Wherein then lay the opposition of the world to God? It lay in opposition unto the person, doctrine, graces, gifts, and office of the Holy Ghost, as he supplies the room of Christ, to carry on his kingdom in the world. The great opposition that is made in the world against God at this day, is immediately against the work of the Holy Ghost, as carrying on the kingdom of Christ in the world. These are the objects of reproach and contempt.

By the way observe, that the opposition which was made by the heathens in their idolatry against the Deity, against God; and that made by the Jews against the person of Christ, and that which is now made against the work of the Holy Ghost is all the same; the nature of the opposition is not changed, but only the object. The opposition that was in Cain, and the profession in Abel, is the same still: the one embraces the revelation of God, the other opposes it; and that principle that acts against the Holy Ghost, would act against God, and set up idolatry in the world.

And hence we may see, that whereas God has in the days wherein we live, given a great and illustrious testimony unto the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, it may be as great as in any age since the time he gave extraordinary gifts to the apostles, and Satan had lost the advantage of managing an opposition by open blasphemies and reproaches of the Spirit, and being somewhat impatient till it returned into his hands again, he raises up another spirit that should stand in competition with it, and do the same thing; a spirit, which like the unclean spirit that cast him into the fire and into the water, in whom he was, threw those possessed by it into all difficulties to manifest itself. But whatsoever glory it might have put upon it in some men, by enabling them to suffer and bear the rage of the world that was cast upon them, there are three things that will discover that it is not a spirit from God.

1st. The place from whence it comes: it comes not from above, it is not looked for, prayed for, to be the Spirit of Christ from heaven which he hath promised; but is a mushroom that grows up in a night, the gourd of a night that

springs up within themselves, and is called the light within them all. Now the Spirit that doth the work of God is promised from above, is given by Christ, and is expected and received from thence.

2dly. It is known also by its company. The Spirit which beareth witness with Christ is always accompanied with the word; Isa. lix. 21. 'This is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth,' &c. Now the work of this spirit, is to cast the word of God out of the church, to render it useless.

3dly. It is known by its work. The work of the Spirit of God is to glorify Christ; the work of this spirit is to glorify itself, to resolve all into itself, for measure, rule, principle, and all abilities.

I could not but mention this by the way, because I put the great opposition that is made in the world in these days against the Spirit of God, his graces and gifts, and the worship which believers are enabled to perform by the Spirit, in this thing. And therefore let us try the spirits, and not believe every spirit that is gone forth.

This is the first thing we are not to be ashamed of, viz. The truths of God that are reproached in the world, especially those concerning the Spirit, his graces and gifts, and the revelation of the mystery of the gospel, while a heathenish morality is advanced in their place. God forbid we should be ashamed of the gospel in this respect; that every one of us should not bear his testimony, as God is pleased to call us.

2. There is the worship of the gospel, which is always exposed to reproach and contempt in the world in the due performance of it. I pray God to keep this always in our minds, that we have no other way to be ashamed of the gospel, but by being ashamed of these things; and we have no other way to be ashamed of them, than by neglecting the due performance of them, as the gospel commands.

Men are ashamed of the worship of the gospel, (1.) Upon the account of the worshippers; and, (2.) Upon the account of the worship itself.

(1.) Upon the account of the worshippers, who are for the most part poor and contemptible in the world; for 'not many

great, not many noble, not many wise and learned are called.' Whatsoever work God hath to do by his, they are looked upon as the off-scouring of all things, such a company as those who are of gallant minds and spirits, do despise. I wonder what thoughts they would have had of Christ himself when followed by a company of fishermen, women, and children, crying Hosannah; and others, who said, 'This people who know not the law are cursed;' John vii. 49. Now is not a man apt to be ashamed of such abjects as follow Christ? Shall a man leave the society of great, and wise, and learned men, to join with them? Let those think of it who are upon any account lift up in the world above their brethren. Do not be ashamed of them; they are such as you must accompany, if ever you intend to come to glory. We must keep company with them here, if we intend it hereafter. And therefore be not ashamed of the worship of Christ because of the worshippers; though they can do nothing but love Christ and worship him; notwithstanding the suffrage that lies against them by great and learned men, such as were at Rome when Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

(2.) Upon the account of the worship itself. The world is, and ever was in love with a gaudy worship, which some of them have called, being well painted, the beauty of holiness. The Jews and Samaritans take them in all; the one was for the temple, the other for the mountain. The gospel comes and calls them from them both, to worship God in spirit and in truth; to a worship that hath no beauty but what is given by the Spirit of Christ; nor order, but what is given by the word. This is greatly despised in the world, and not only despised, but persecuted, I mean, sometimes it was so, I am sure formerly. Therefore the apostle gives that caution, Heb. x. 25. If you would not be ashamed, 'forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.' There is a synecdoche in the word assembling, and it is put for the whole worship of Christ, because worship was performed in their assemblies; and he that forsakes the assemblies, forsakes the worship of Christ, as some of them did when exposed to danger: and it is the manner of some still to do so. When a fair day comes, then they will go to the assemblies; but in a storm they will absent themselves, as

did the Samaritans. But what should move them to forsake their assembling? He tells you, ver. 33, 34. 'Ye were made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, and the spoiling of your goods. But you know in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' This made some weary of assembling; but be not you ashamed of assembling, or of the worship of God. This is the second thing that is exposed to shame and reproach in the world; and which in particular we are bound by our profession not to be ashamed of.

SERMON XXXVIII.*

3. We are not to be ashamed of the professors of the gospel. Our Lord Christ hath laid it down as an everlasting rule, that in them he is honoured, or dishonoured, in the world. And it is the great rule whereby false professors will be tried at the last day; men who pretend a profession of the name of Christ, as you may see, Matt. xxv. 40. 45. 'What you have done unto them, you have done unto me,' saith he, and 'what you have omitted, that ought to have been done to them, you have omitted the doing of it unto me.' It is those alone in whom Christ may be honoured or despised in this world: for he is in himself, in his own person in that condition, that our goodness, our honour, extends not immediately unto him; and for the contempt and despising of men, he is not concerned in it. Hence this is reckoned as the great commendation of the faith of Moses, Heb. xi. 23—26. that he refused all the honours of the world, and all the reputation he might have had, to own and esteem the poor, reproached, despised, persecuted interest of Christ in the world, as he there calls it. He joined himself unto the professors of the faith, in opposition to all the world, and the greatness of it, which was his greatest commendation. And see the pathetical prayer of the apostle Paul for Onesiphorus upon the discharge of this duty, 2 Tim. i. 16—18. 'The Lord,' saith he, 'give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.' Onesiphorus was a man of some credit and repute in the world; poor Paul was a prisoner bound with a chain, that he might have been ashamed to own him; but instead of that, he sought him out, he was not ashamed of his chain. To be ashamed of the poor professors of the gospel, so in themselves, or made so by the power of oppressors, is to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, his truths, his worship, and his people.

* This sermon was preached May 26, 1670.

4. There is a special kind of profession, that in its own nature is exposed to reproach in the world. The apostle Paul tells us, 2 Tim. iii. 12. 'They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.' There is, John xv. 4, 5. a being in Christ by profession, and not living godly; for there are branches in the vine by profession, that bring forth no fruit; men that have a profession wherewith they do not trouble the world, and for which the world will not trouble them; that can go to that length in compliance with the world, and the ways of it, as that they shall not have one drop of the spirit of the witnesses of Christ, who torments the men of the earth. But 'they that will live godly,' that is, engage in a profession, that shall upon all occasions, and in all instances manifest the power of it, they 'shall suffer persecution.' We see many every day keep up a profession, but such a profession as will not provoke the world. Now this is to be ashamed of the gospel, to be ashamed of the power and glory of it, to be ashamed of the author of it; no man can put Jesus Christ to greater shame, than by professing the gospel without shewing the power of it.

III. I shall now give the reasons why we ought not in any thing to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. I speak unto persons that are under a conviction that such and such things belong unto the gospel. If we are not, what makes us here this day? I do not go to persuade any, that this or that worship, or this or that way, is according to the gospel; but I suppose a conviction thereof to be upon us; upon a supposition of which conviction and persuasion, I shall offer these reasons, why we ought not to be ashamed of the gospel. And,

1. The first is this; because Christ, the captain of our salvation, and the great example of our obedience, was not ashamed of all that he had to undergo for us.

There are two things that greatly aggravate things shameful, and press, if possible, shame upon a person.

(1.) The dignity of the person that is exposed to things shameful. It is more for a person honourable, noble, and in repute for wisdom in the world, to be exposed to indignities, reproaches, and things shameful, as the apostle speaks; than for beggars, poor, vile persons, of no repute. Now consider the person of Christ, who he was, and what

he was. He was the eternal Son of God, the 'first-born of the whole creation;' and, as in his divine nature, he was 'the express,' the essential 'image of the Father,' so in his whole person, as incarnate, he was the glory of all the works of God. And the apostle, when he would set out the great condescension of Christ in submitting unto things shameful, doth at the same time describe the greatness and glory of his person; Phil. ii. 6—8. 'He made himself,' says he, 'of no reputation; he took upon him the form of a servant, and he was obedient unto the death of the cross;' which three things, as I could shew you, are comprehensive of all that was shameful to Christ. But at the same time that he tells us what he did, how doth he describe him? When he did so, he was 'in the form of God, and accounted it no robbery to be equal with God:' he was the great God in his own person, and equal with the Father; yet then this honourable one condescended to all things shameful and reproachful in the world.

(2.) Shame is aggravated from the causes and matter of it. There are various things that cause shame. Some are put to shame by reproaches, scandals, lies; some by poverty; some by imprisonment; and some by death, made shameful by the ways, means, and preparations for it. By which of these was Christ now made an object of shame? By all of them, and inconceivably more than any heart is able to apprehend, or tongue to express. He was reproached as a wine-bibber, and a glutton; as a seditious person, and mover of sedition; as a fanatic, and one besides himself. He was in that state of poverty, that during the whole course of his ministry he had not where to lay his head, nor any thing to live upon, but what good people administered unto him of their substance. In the midst of this course he was taken praying, when he told them, they might have taken him at any time. 'I was,' says he, 'in the temple openly, I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.' He was taken by soldiers with swords and staves, as a thief and malefactor; apprehended, carried away, and hanged upon a tree, the shamefulest death then in the world, in the midst of Jews and Gentiles, with both which sorts of men that kind of death was the most shameful: the Romans put none to that sort of death but slaves, thieves, and rob-

bers, the worst malefactors; and among the Jews it was the only kind of death that was accursed; Deut. xxi. 23. 'He that is hanged on the tree is accursed of God.' Which words our apostle repeats, and applies them to Christ, Gal. iii. 13. How did Christ behave himself now, as to all these shameful things that came upon him? Hear the prophet expressing of it in his name, Isa. l. 6, 7. 'I gave my back to the smiter, and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair;' (the usual way of dealing with persons in such cases) 'I hid not my face from shame and spitting; for the Lord God will help me, therefore I shall not be confounded; I know I shall not be ashamed.' Did he recoil, or go back from his work? Did he repent of it? No: 'Thy law is written in my heart;' I am content 'to do thy will, O God.' And in the issue of the whole, Heb. xii. 2. 'He despised the shame, and endured the cross,' which made way for his glory.

Now here lies the foundation of our reason; If the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, being engaged purely out of his own love in a work for us poor, vile, sinful worms of the earth, whom he might have left justly to perish under the wrath of God, which we had deserved, underwent all these shameful things, and never had a recoiling thought to draw back, and leave us to ourselves; have we not an obligation of love, gratitude, and obedience, not to be ashamed of those few drops of this great storm that may possibly fall upon us in this world for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can we be disciples of Christ, and yet think in this matter to be above our Master? Can we be his servants, and think to be above our Lord? We are delicate and tender, and would fain have all men speak well of us. But we must come to another frame, if we intend to be the disciples of Christ. What would be the issue of our account at the last day, if he should inquire of us what we have done in reference to the profession of the gospel? Whether we have observed all those duties, that we have had a conviction upon our spirits and consciences we ought to observe and perform in the assembling of ourselves, in the dispensation of the word, in the celebration of ordinances, in prayer, fasting, hearing the word, and all those things which the gospel requires of us? Should we make that answer, Truly, Lord, we thought all very good, but were afraid if we engaged in

them, we should have been exposed to all the reproach, contempt, and trouble in the world; it would have brought trouble upon our persons, and the spoiling of our goods; it would have brought us into great distress? What would then be the reply, according to the rule of the gospel, but, Stand upon your own bottom, that was my day, these were things I required of you; you were ashamed of me, I am now ashamed of you? Certainly this would be a woful issue of it. But,

2. The second reason is this; That whatsoever state or condition we may be brought into, upon the account of the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ will not be ashamed of us in that state and condition. I told you before, in the opening of the words, that shame principally respects dishonour and disreputation, that the things we are engaged in are vile, contemptible, exposed to reproach. Now if a man in any thing he is called in question about, have those who are great and honourable to abide by him, and own the cause wherein he is engaged, whatever other affections he may have, it will take off his shame. Now this great and honourable person will not be ashamed of us in any condition: Heb. ii. 11. 'He is not ashamed to call them brethren.' But suppose they are poor, and have nothing left them in this world? It is all one. Suppose they are in prison? Christ will stand by them, and say, 'These are my brethren.' The word ἐπαισχύνεται, 'ashamed,' is there used peculiarly in respect to those shameful things that may befall us in this world. Notwithstanding all these sufferings, yet 'he is not ashamed to call them brethren.' Doth he go no farther? Yes; Heb. xi. 16. 'Wherefore' (speaking directly to this cause in hand) 'God is not ashamed to be called their God.' What is the reason it is so expressed? The words are emphatical. Look upon the two parties that are in the world; the one great, wise, glorious, powerful, and at liberty; the other poor, despised, contemned all the world over. God comes into the world and sees these two parties: Which now do you think he owns? Is it not a shame for the great and glorious God to own poor, despised, contemned, reproached, persecuted ones? No: God 'is not ashamed to be called their God;' their God in particular, their God in covenant, one that owns them in opposition to all the world, with

whom they have to conflict. Oh, that we would persuade our hearts in every duty that this is our state, that Jesus Christ stands by, and saith, 'I am not ashamed of you!' God stands by, and saith, 'I am not ashamed to be owned to be your God!' Is not this great encouragement?

3. The third reason is, Because in the profession of the gospel we are called to nothing at all that is shameful in the judgment of any sober, wise, rational, judicious man. If the profession of the gospel called us unto any thing that is vile, dishonourable, unholy, of ill report among men, certainly we had reason to be extremely cautious of our practising of it. But is it any shame to own God to be our God, to own Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Master, to profess we must yield obedience unto the commands of Christ? Is there any shame in praying, in hearing of the word of God, in preaching of it according to his mind and will? Is there any shame in fasting, in godly conference? Let all the world be judge, whether there be any thing shameful in these things, which are good, useful, honourable to all mankind. The gospel calls to nothing that is shameful. Therefore the old heathens were so wise that they would not, against the light of nature, oppress the assemblies of Christians where there was nothing shameful; and therefore they charged all shameful things upon them. The whole vogue of the world was, that they met together to further promiscuous lusts and seditions. They made that their pretence; they durst not disturb them merely upon the account of their profession. And it is so still: men little know that we will not, dare not, cannot take the name of our God in vain, and prostitute any ordinance of God to give the least semblance to any seditious practice. Whatsoever violence may come upon the disciples of Christ, they had rather die than prostitute an ordinance of Christ, to give the least countenance or semblance to any such thing. The gospel calls us to nothing that hath any reproach in it. If men will esteem the strict profession of the gospel, praying, hearing the word, abstinence from sin, to be shameful things; if they will count it strange that we run not out into the same excess of riot with themselves; shall we stand to the judgment of such sensualists, that live in a perpetual contradiction to themselves? who profess that they honour Christ, and at the same time

reproach every thing of Christ in the world? We have no reason then to be ashamed of the gospel, which requires no shameful thing at our hands, nothing that is evil and hurtful to mankind; nothing but what is good, holy, beautiful, commendable, and useful unto all societies of mankind. And we dare not prostitute the least part of an ordinance, to the encouraging any disorder in this world, and therein take the name of our God in vain.

4. The fourth reason is that which the apostle gives us, Heb. xii. 1. 'We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,' to this very end and purpose. In the preceding chapter he had given a catalogue of many under the Old Testament, patriarchs and prophets (time would have failed him to reckon up all), who signally manifested they were not ashamed of the gospel, and the promises of it, whatever difficulties did befall them. And now, saith the apostle, you 'have a cloud of witnesses,' the great examples of those holy souls that are now at rest with God, enjoying the triumphs of Christ over all his adversaries: they were, as you are, conflicting in this world with reproaches, adversaries, persecution; and they had this issue by faith, they made a conquest over all. And James says, 'You have, my brethren, the prophets and apostles for your examples.' The Lord help us to take the example they have set us, Acts v. 41. when they went away triumphing, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame and reproach for the name of Christ. The Lord help us that we dishonour not the gospel by giving the world reason to say, that there is a race of professors risen up now, who have no manner of conformity to them who went before them in the profession of the gospel.

5. The next reason I shall insist upon is taken out of the text, the particular reason the apostle here gives, why he was not ashamed of it. 'I am not ashamed,' saith he, 'of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God to salvation to all that believe.' We talk of profession of the gospel. What is it, say some, but canting among yourselves, speaking things unintelligible? Such kind of expressions are cast upon it in the world. But, saith the apostle, this gospel we profess is quite another thing than you dream or think of, and we profess it no other, nor ever will engage one day in the profession of the gospel any farther, than as it comes

under this account, that 'it is the power of God unto salvation.' Manifest to me, that any way or parcel of the gospel which we do profess, or practise, hath not the power of God in it, and upon it, towards the furtherance of salvation, and I will throw off that profession.

But you will ask, perhaps, In what sense is the gospel the power of God?

I answer, In a threefold sense.

(1.) Negatively: there is not any other power in it. The world saw that there was a great efficacy in the gospel, and they knew not whence it was; but they charged it upon two things: First, Upon the matter of it, that it was a cunningly devised fable. So the apostle Peter tells us, 2 Epist. i. 16. 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power of Christ.' The world charged it so, and thought that gave it its efficacy. Secondly, There was another thing to which they thought its efficacy was owing, and that was the eloquence and power of its preachers. The preachers of it were surely eloquent, excellent men, that they could so prevail upon the people, and win them over to the gospel. No, saith the apostle, 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. 'My speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.' But let not men mistake; the efficacy of the gospel is owing to neither of these causes, but to the divine power that accompanies it.

(2.) It was the power of God declaratively: it made known the power of God. So our apostle declares in the very next words to the text: 'For therein,' saith he, 'is the righteousness of God revealed.' It hath made a revelation of the way whereby God will save men. It makes a revelation of that power which God puts forth for the salvation of men.

(3.) It is the power of God instrumentally. It is the instrument God puts forth to effect his great and mighty works in the world. Preaching is looked upon as a very foolish thing in the world. 'We preach Christ crucified, to the Greeks foolishness;' 1 Cor. i. 23. But God hath chosen this foolish thing to confound the wise. And though the preachers of it are very weak men, mere earthen vessels, God hath

chosen this weak thing to bring to nought things that are strong and mighty, the things of this world. Therefore, Acts xx. 32. it is called 'the word of God's grace, which is able to build us up, and give us an inheritance among them that are sanctified.' The plain preaching of it hath this power upon the souls of men, to convince them, convert them, draw them home to God, to expose them to all troubles in this world, to make them let go their reputation and livelihood, and expose themselves even to death itself: it is the power of God to these ends and purposes; God hath made it his instrument for that end. If it were the power of God to give peace and prosperity unto a nation, or to heal the sick, there is no man need, or ought to be ashamed of it; but to be the power of God for so excellent an end, as the eternal salvation of the souls of men, makes it much more glorious. The gospel we profess, all the parts of it, every thing wherein it is engaged, is that whereby God puts forth his power to save our poor souls, and the souls of them who believe: and the Lord God never lay it to the charge of any who would hinder the dispensation of the gospel unto this end and purpose. It were sad for men to keep corn from the poor, physic from the sick, that lie a dying; but to keep the word of God from the souls of men, that they might be saved, Lord, lay it not to the charge of any.

The author of the gospel was not ashamed of his work he engaged in on our behalf; is not ashamed of us in any of our sufferings, in any of the shameful things we may undergo. The gospel requires no shameful thing at our hands; puts us upon no duty that can justly expose us to shame; the things are good, useful, honourable to men. We have a cloud of witnesses about us: and if any man require of us, what this gospel is, which we profess, and an account whereupon we profess it, we can make this answer; 'It is the power of God unto salvation;' and for that end alone do we profess it.

I might speak to some farther reasons, to shew why this duty is indispensably necessary; for, as I said, it is not only that we ought not to be ashamed, but the duty is indispensable. And I thought to have spoken to those two heads, which alone make a duty indispensable, that we may not upon any account be against it; because it is necessary, as

we say, 'necessitate præcepti;' and likewise, 'necessitate medii;' that is, both upon the command of Christ, and upon the account of the order of the things themselves.

It is necessary upon the command of Christ, because he hath required it at our hands, and under that condition, that if ever we intend to be owned by him at the last day, we should own his gospel in the profession of it. All the world, and all our own things, and all the injunctions of the sons of men, cannot give a dispensation to our souls to exempt them from under the authority of the commands of Christ. Let us look unto ourselves, we are under the commands of Christ, and there is no one particular duty to be avoided, but what must be accommodated to this rule. And not only so,

But it is necessary also from the order of things: Christ hath appointed it as a means for that great end of bringing our souls to salvation. As well may a man arrive to a city, and never come into the way that leads unto it, as we go to rest with Christ, and never come to the profession of the gospel, nor abide by it: this is the way that leads unto it.

I have done with what I thought to deliver upon this doctrine, and among many uses that might be made, I shall only commend one unto you, without which it will be utterly impossible that any of us shall be able at the long run to keep up to the profession of the gospel, or any duty of it. And that is this:

Use. Get an experience of the power of the gospel, and all the ordinances of it, in and upon your own hearts, or all your profession is an expiring thing: unless, I say, you find the power of God upon your own hearts in every ordinance, expect not any continuance in your profession. If the preaching of the word be not effectual unto the renewing of your souls, the illuminating of your minds, the endearing of your hearts to God, if you do not find power in it, you will quickly reason with yourselves, upon what account should you adventure trouble and reproach for it.

If you have an experience of this power upon your hearts, it will recover all your recoiling, wandering thoughts, when you find you cannot live without it. It is so as to every ordinance whatever, unless we can have some experience of the benefit of it, and of the power and efficacy of the grace of God

in it, we can never expect to abide in our profession of it. What will you bear witness unto, an empty, bare profession, that neither honoureth God, nor doth good to your own souls?

If you would then be established in this truth, of not being ashamed of the gospel, recall to your minds what benefit you have received by it. Have you received any advantage by hearing the word? Hath it at any time restored your souls when you have been wandering? Hath it comforted you when you have been cast down? Hath it engaged your hearts unto God? Recall to mind what benefit and advantage you have had by it; and then ask, what it hath done, that now you should forsake it? And in every ordinance that you are made partakers of, inquire diligently what power of God upon your own hearts goes forth in the dispensation of that ordinance. This will confirm and strengthen you; and without this, all your profession is vain, and will signify nothing.

SERMON XXXIX.*

GOD THE SAINTS' ROCK.

From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.—Psal. lxi. 2.

THERE are two things in the words. First, The state wherein the psalmist was. Secondly, The course that he steered in that state.

His estate is doubly expressed: 1. From the place where he was; 'from the end of the earth.' And, 2. From the condition he was in; his 'heart was overwhelmed.'

And in the course he steered there are two things also. 1. The manner of it: he 'cried unto the Lord. 2. The matter of that cry: 'Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.'

First, There is the state wherein he was. And,

1. The first description of it (for both parts are metaphorical) is from the place where he was: 'The end of the earth.' Now this may be taken two ways: either naturally, and then it is an allusion to men that are far distant and remote from help, relief, and comfort; or, as I may say, ecclesiastically, with reference to the temple of God, which was 'in medio terræ,' 'in the midst and heart of the land,' where God manifested and gave tokens of his gracious presence and favour: as if he had said; I am at the end of the earth, far from any tokens, pledges, or manifestations of the love and favour of God; as well as from outward help and assistance.

2. The second description of his state is, that his heart was overwhelmed. Wherein we have two things.

(1.) A confluence of calamities and distresses. (2.) The effect they had upon him; his heart was overwhelmed, and fainted under them. As long as the heart will hold up they may be borne: 'The spirit of a man will bear his infirmity;' but when 'the spirit is wounded,' and the heart faints, a confluence of calamities greatly oppresses.

What is meant by overwhelmed, himself declares in

* This sermon was preached Nov. 11, 1670.

another place, Psal. cii. The title of the psalm is, 'A prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed.' And he describes that condition in the psalm itself, ver. 3, 4, &c. 'My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt as an hearth. My heart is smitten and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop. Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.' To be overwhelmed is to be under a confluence of all manner of distressing calamities. Psal. cxlii. 3, 4. he describes again what it is to be overwhelmed: 'When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, I looked on the right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know me, refuge failed me: no man cared for my soul.' So that to have a confluence of manifold distresses, with an eye to the indignation of God, as the spring of those distresses, until the spirit sink and faint under it, is to have the heart overwhelmed. This is his state and condition.

Secondly, The course he takes in this state, as we have already observed, is also doubly expressed.

1. In the manner of it: 'I cried,' saith he, 'unto thee.' The word is frequently used in this case in Scripture; and it is naturally expressive of the principal actings of faith in a distressed condition.

There are four things that faith will do in a condition of distress in believers; and they are all of them comprised in this expression: 'I cried.'

(1.) It will make the heart sensible of the affliction. God abhors the proud and the stubborn, that think by their own spirits to bear up under their pressures. Isa. xlvi. 12. 'Hearken, ye stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness.' Persons that think to bear themselves up, when God dealeth with them, by their stout heart, are such, whom of all others God most despises and abhors: they are 'far from righteousness.' Now crying doth include a sense of evils and pressures the soul is exercised withal, and that we do

not despise God when we are chastened, as well as that we do not utterly faint, but cry unto the Lord.

(2.) The next act of faith is a holy complaint unto God in such a state and condition. So the psalmist tells us, Psal. cii. 'A prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.' He often mentions 'his complaint, coming with his complaint unto the Lord.' And God takes nothing more kindly, than when we come to him with our complaints, not repining at them, but spreading them before the Lord, as from whom alone we expect relief: for it declares we believe God concerns himself in our state and condition. There is no man so foolish, whatsoever he suffers, as to go unto them with his complaints whom he supposes are not concerned in him, nor have any compassion for him. It is a professing unto God, that we believe he is concerned in our condition, when we cry unto him, and pour out before him our complaints.

(3.) There is in it an endeavour to approach unto God. As you do when you cry after one whom you see at a distance, and are afraid he will go farther from you. It is the great work of faith to cry out after God at a distance, when you are afraid lest at the next turn he should be quite out of sight. Crying to the Lord, supposes him to be withdrawing or departing.

(4.) There is earnestness in it. It is expressive of the greatest earnestness of spirit we can use, when we cry out in any case.

Thus he behaves himself during the condition described. He had a sense of his distress; he makes his complaint unto the Lord; he cries out after him for fear he should withdraw himself; and that with earnestness, that God might come in to his help.

2. The matter of it is, That God would 'lead him to the rock,' that is, that God would give him an access unto himself by Jesus Christ, in whom God is our rock and our refuge in all our distresses: that he would but open a way through all his dark and overwhelming entanglements, that he might come unto himself, there to issue the troubles and perplexities that he was exercised withal.

That which I would speak to you from the words thus opened, is this:

Observation. In the most overwhelming, calamitous distresses that may befall a believing soul, faith still eyes a reserve in God, and delights to break through all to come unto him; though at the same time, it looks upon God as the author of those calamities.

I have told you before in the opening of the words, what I intend by these overwhelming distresses. They are of two sorts, inward and outward.

First, Inward, in perplexities upon the soul and conscience about sin. When the soul is in darkness, and hath no apprehension of any ground upon which it may have acceptance with God; when it is pressed with the guilt of sin, and abides in darkness upon that account, and hath no light.

Secondly, Outward; and these are of two sorts.

1. Private, in afflictions, losses, sickness, pains, poverty, either as to ourselves, or those who are near unto us, and wherein we are concerned. These may sometimes have such an edge put upon them, as to prove overwhelming.

2. Public, in reference unto the church of God; when that is in great distress, when there is no prospect of relief, no beam of light; when the summer is past, and the harvest ended, expectations come to an issue, and no relief ensues: this is an overwhelming distress to them, whose hearts are in the ways of God, and have a concern in his glory. When Zion is in the dust, and the bones of the children of Zion lie scattered like wood upon the face of the earth.

These are the heads of overwhelming distresses. And I say, faith looks upon them as proceeding from God. Is the soul in distress upon the account of sin? They are God's rebukes, God's arrows, it is God that hath caused this darkness. Is it troubled or pressed upon the account of afflictions or dangers? 'Affliction,' saith faith, 'doth not spring out of the earth,' or troubles from the ground: these things are from God. Is it with respect unto the church of God, 'Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?' Is it not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? It is therefore his wrath and indignation in all these things. Yet notwithstanding this, faith will look through all, and make a reserve in God himself.

I shall,

I. Give some instances of this.

II. Shew the grounds of it.

III. Come to that which I chiefly intend, namely, to discover what it is in God that in such an overwhelming condition faith can see and fix upon, to give it support and relief.

IV. Shew how this differs from that general reserve which the nature of man is apt to take in his thoughts of God in distress.

I. I am to give some instances. And we have a very remarkable instance of this in Jonah, who tells us, chap. ii. 2. that he was in 'the belly of hell.' Hell in Scripture, when it is applied to the things of this world, doth intend the depth of temporal evils; as in Psal. xviii. 4. 'The sorrows of hell compassed me,' saith David, speaking of the time of his affliction and persecution under Saul. And 'the belly of hell' must needs be the darkness and confusion of all those calamitous distresses. Where did Jonah (viewing himself in this condition), look for the cause from whence it did proceed? He tells us, ver. 3. 'for thou hast cast me into the deep.' He knew the occasion of it was his own sinful frowardness; the instrumental cause, the mariners upon his own persuasion; but he refers it all to the principal cause, God himself: 'Thou hast cast me into the deep.' And how did this affect him? ver. 7. 'My soul fainted within me.' What relief then had he? ver. 5, 6. 'The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottom of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever.' No manner of relief, support, or succour to be expected. What did he do in this case? He tells presently, 'My prayer came in unto thee,' saith he, looking upon God as he who had cast him into this condition; his eye was to him. David gives us several instances of it in himself. Once I acknowledge he was mistaken in his course. He tells us so, Psal. lv. 3—5. he had described the overwhelming condition wherein he was. And what course doth he take? ver. 6. 'O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest; I would wander afar off, and be in the wilderness.' O that I was gone from the midst of all these perplexities,

that I was rid of those that are ready to overwhelm me But this was not a right course. I might give innumerable instances of the contrary: Psal. xxxi. 8—10, &c. is a description of as sad a condition as any man can fall into, and which is accompanied with a great sense of God's displeasure, and of his own sin; ver. 10. 'My strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.' What course doth he then take? ver. 14. 'But I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God.' When my strength failed because of mine iniquities, and my bones were consumed; when there was nothing but distress round about me, and that from God; yet then 'I trusted in thee, and said, Thou art my God.' And this is what God himself invites us unto, Isa. xl. 27. There is a complaint made by Jacob; 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.' We have but two things wherein we are concerned in this world, as we are professors of the gospel; and they are, our way, and our judgment. Our way, that is, the course of obedience and profession, which according to the truth we are engaged in; as believing in Christ is called 'a way.' My way of faith, my way of worship, my way of obedience is hid from the Lord; God takes no notice of it; which is as much as to say, my all in the things of God is at a loss, God takes no notice of my way. Should that be our condition, really we should be of all men most miserable. But there is also our judgment, that is, the judgment that is to be passed upon our cause, and way, which David doth so often pray about, when he begs that God would 'judge him in his righteousness.' Now saith the church here, God takes no notice of it, but hath put off the cause to the world; my judgment is passed over, determined for me no more, but he lets me suffer under the judgment of the world. And truly when our way and judgment is passed over, profession and obedience as it were hid from God, God takes no notice of them. And when he puts off the judgment and determination of our cause, what have we more in the world? What doth God now propose to them for their relief? What promises, what encouragements will he remind them of? Nothing but himself, ver. 28. 'Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the

Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.' God calls them to consider him in his own nature and being, with those glorious acts suited thereunto. He calls our faith to look for rest in himself alone. It is impossible thy way and thy judgment should thus pass over from him, because he is 'the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator.'

II. I come now to the grounds of it, whence it is that faith doth this. And that is upon a twofold account.

1. Because it knows how to distinguish between the nature of the covenant, and the external administration of it.

2. Because it is natural to faith so to do; and that upon a double account, as we shall see presently.

1. Faith doth this, because it is able to distinguish between the covenant itself, which is firm, stable, invariable; and the administration of the covenant, which is various and changeable; I mean the outward administration of it. And this God teaches us, Psal. lxxxix. 30—34. 'If his children' [the children of Jesus Christ] 'forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.' The covenant of God shall stand firm and unalterable then, when the rod and the stripes of men are upon our backs. In the midst of all God's visiting for iniquity, whether by internal rebukes, or outward chastisements, yet faith sees the covenant stable, and so makes unto God upon that account. David, when he comes to die, gives it as the sum of all his observation, that the covenant was immutable, but the outward administration various; 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. 'Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.' However God doth deal with my house, whatever misery is brought upon us, yet the covenant itself is everlasting, ordered in all things and sure. Whatever misery and distress may fall upon a believing soul, and I pray God help me to believe it, as well as to say it, whatever darkness or temptation he may be ex-

ercised withal upon the account of sin, whatever pressure in afflictions, persecutions, dangers, may befall him; they all belong unto God's covenant dispensation in dealing with him. For God being his God in covenant, he acts according to the covenant in all things. Hence saith Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 16. 'O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.' What are these things? Why, saith he, 'I reckoned till morning, that as a lion so will he break all my bones; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it; I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.' One would think the next words would be, By these things men die. No: but 'by these things believers live, and in all these things is the life of my soul;' because they are all administered from the invariable covenant for the good of the souls of them who are exercised with them. Now as God is pleased to declare himself, so is the soul to think of God in these dispensations of the covenant. Doth God hide his face, and leave the soul to darkness? In darkness it must be. Job xxxiv. 29. 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? And when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?' Whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only; be it against one person, or the whole church of God; if he hides his face, and causeth darkness, none can behold him. When God chastens us, we cannot but look upon him as angry; when he gives us up into the hands of men, hard masters, we cannot but look upon it as a token of his displeasure. When God doth thus in his outward dispensation of the covenant, so that all things are dark, and shew nothing but displeasure, and we are to look upon him as a God that hideth himself, and is displeased with us, and exercising anger towards us; in such a day, what shall the soul then do? Why under all these outward tokens of God's displeasure, faith will, though but weak and faint, work through unto God himself, as invariable in his covenant, and there have a reserve in him beyond them all. Psal. xcvii. 2. 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.' I confess I have clouds and darkness round about me, but if I could but break through these clouds and darkness, that are the consequents

of God's hiding his face, and come to his throne, there is righteousness and judgment, that righteousness and judgment wherein he hath betrothed me unto himself in covenant; Hos. ii. 19. Could I get through this darkness of mind, this pressure upon my spirit, this sense of guilt, and come unto his throne; there I should find him faithful and stable in his promises, and unalterable in his love. Now suppose a person to have all these things upon him at once; that God hath left him to a great sense of sin (for our troubles about sin are not according to the greatness of our sin, but to the sense God will let in upon us; and they are not to be reckoned the greatest sinners, who are most troubled for their sin), and his troubles are very great; and at the same time the Lord in his providential dispensation is pleased to exercise him in sharp afflictions; and if at the same time his interest and concernment in the people of God is likewise in darkness and distress, that there is no relief in that neither; to such a one there are clouds and darkness round about God. What then will faith do in such a case? Why true faith will secretly work through all to the throne of God, where there is righteousness, and judgment, and acceptance with him. So it is said, Isa. viii. 17. 'I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.' The face of God is his love in Christ, and the shining of his countenance in the promises of the covenant; for the way whereby God communicates his love unto our hearts, is by his promises. Now when the soul is sensible of no communication of love, nor promise of it, then God is said to hide his face. What will faith do in such a case? betake itself unto any thing else for relief? No, saith he, 'I will wait upon God that hideth his face.' As a traveller, when the sky is filled with clouds and darkness, tempests and storms, that are ready to break upon him everywhere; yet remembers that these are but interpositions, and the sun is where it was, and if he can but shelter himself till the storm be over, the sun will shine out again, and its beams refresh him: so is it with the soul in this case, it remembers God is still where he was; though there are clouds within, and distresses without, sorrow, and anguish, and fears round about us, and the enemy enters into the very soul; yet the sun is where it was still, God will hide us where we may abide till

this indignation be overpast, and the light of his countenance will yet shine upon me again. Faith considers God in the midst of all his various administrations, and so finds a way for relief.

2. Faith will naturally thus act, as it is the principle of the new nature in us that came from God, and will tend unto him, whatever difficulties lie in the way.

Evangelical faith will have a secret double tendency to God.

(1.) Upon that necessary respect which it indispensably and uncontrollably hath to Jesus Christ; for it being the purchase of Christ, and wrought in us by his Spirit, and being the product and travail of the soul of Christ, it hath a natural tendency unto him: 1 Pet. i. 21. 'Who by him do believe in God;' by Christ as mediator, as our surety, undertaking for us. That let what will overwhelm the soul, where there is but the least faith, it will have relief in this, that Christ was substituted in its room against all real indignation and wrath from God. The father of the faithful was once reduced to great distress, when he had lifted up his knife to the throat of his only son; but when destruction lies so near at the door, a voice called to him from heaven, and stopped him, and he looked behind him and saw a ram caught for a sacrifice to God. When many a poor soul hath the knife at the throat of all his consolations, ready to die away, he hears a voice behind him, that makes him look and see Christ provided for him, as a substituted sacrifice in his room.

(2.) The new creature is the child of God, whereof faith is the principle. It is begotten of God, of his own will; and so against all interpositions and difficulties whatsoever is tending to him.

III. I now proceed to shew, what it is, that in such an overwhelming condition as I have described, faith regards in God, to give it a support and relief, that it be not utterly swallowed up and overwhelmed. And,

1. The first thing faith considers in such a condition, is, the nature of God himself, and his excellencies. This is that which God in the first place proposes for our relief: Hos. xi. 9. 'I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim.' What reason

doth he give to assure us that he will not? 'For,' saith he, 'I am God, and not man; the holy One in the midst of thee.' He proposes his own nature to our faith to confirm us, that whatever our expectations be, he will not execute the fierceness of his wrath; and he reproaches them who put their trust in any thing that is not God by nature. So Deut. xxxii. 21. 'They have provoked me with that which is not God.' And he curseth him 'that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm;' Jer. xvii. 5. But he proposes himself for our trust, one of infinite goodness, grace, bounty, and patience.

Now there are two ways whereby God proposes his nature, and the consideration of it, for the relief of faith in overwhelming distresses.

(1.) By his name. The name of God, is God himself, Psal. ix. 10. 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee;' that is, they that know thee. Whatsoever the word itself signifies, yet it is the nature of God that is declared by his name. And you know how he doth invite and encourage us to trust in the name of God: 'The name of God is a strong tower; the righteous fly thereto and are safe;' Prov. xviii. 10. Isa. l. 10. 'Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' The name of the Lord is what he declares himself to be: 'The Lord God, gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;' Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Here he reveals and declares his name. God proposes his name, and the declaration of it, against the working of unbelief, which apprehends that he is severe, wrathful, that he watcheth for our halting, treasures up every failing and sin to be avenged of it, and that he will do it in fury. No, saith God, 'fury is not in me;' Isa. xxvii. 4. The Lord is good and gracious, as appears by his name, especially as revealed in Christ; so that faith will find secret encouragement in it in all distresses.

By the way, hence you may observe, that God in former days, whilst revelation was under a progress, and he revealed himself by little and little, did still give out his name according as the state and condition of his church and people required, because he called them to trust in his name. How did he reveal himself unto Abraham? He tells you, Exod. vi. 3. 'I revealed myself unto Abraham by the name of God

Almighty.' So Gen. xvii. 1. he says to him, 'I am the Almighty God.' And he gives an explication of that name, Gen.xv. 1. 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' Abraham was in a state and condition wherein he wanted protection in the world; for he was a stranger, and wandered up and down among strange nations that were stronger than he, and such as he might fear destruction from every day. Fear not, saith God, for 'I am God Almighty; I am thy shield.' And in the faith of this did Abraham travel among the nations. And at that time he had no child. What end then should he have of all his labour and travel? Why, saith God, 'I am thy reward.' And Gen. xiv. where there is a discourse about the nations of the world, who began to fall into idolatry, Melchisedek is called 'a priest of the most high God.' God revealed himself to be a 'high God,' to cast contempt upon their dunghill gods. And when Abraham came to speak with the king of Sodom, he says, 'I have sworn by the high God.' So when God came to bring the people out of the land of Egypt, he revealed himself unto them by his name Jehovah. I did not reveal myself so before, saith God, but now I reveal myself so, because I am come to give subsistence unto my promise. Thus God dealt with them when he came to maintain his church by gradual revelations. But now God reveals himself by his whole name, and we may take what suits our distress, especially that which is comprehensive of all the rest, 'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

(2.) God doth this by comparing himself to such creatures as act out of natural kindness: 'Can a woman forget her sucking child? Yet I will not forget.'

Now there are three reasons why it is necessary that faith in an overwhelming condition should have regard to the nature of God, and the essential properties of his nature for its relief. [1.] Because of the circumstances of our distresses; [2.] Because of the nature of them; and, [3.] Because of the nature of faith.

[1.] Because of the circumstances of our distress. There are three or four circumstances that may befall us in our distress, that faith itself can get no relief against them, but from the essential properties of the nature of God.

1st. The first is, place. Believers may be brought into

distress in all places of the world: in a lion's den with Daniel; in a dungeon with Jeremiah; they may be banished to the ends of the earth, as John to Patmos; or they may be driven into the wilderness, as the woman by the fury of the dragon. The whole church may be cast into places where no eye can see them, no hand relieve them; where none knows whether they are among the living or the dead. Now what can give relief against this circumstance of distress which may befall the people of God? Nothing but what Jeremiah tells us, chap. xxiii. 23. 'Am I a God at hand only, and not afar off, to the ends of the earth?' Psal. cxxxix. 7. 'Whither shall I fly from thy presence? to the utmost ends of the earth?' It is all in vain: the essential omnipresence of God can alone relieve the souls of believers against this great circumstance of various places, whither they may be driven to suffer distress, and be overwhelmed with them. If the world could cast us out, where God is not, and hath nothing to do, how would it triumph? It was a part of their bondage and great difficulty of old, that the solemn worship of God was confined to one certain country and place; so that when the enemies of the church could cast them out from thence, they did as it were say unto them, Go, serve other gods. God hath taken off that bondage; all the world cannot throw us out of a place where we cannot worship God. Wherever there is a holy people, there is a holy land, and we can be driven to no place but God is there: and if we should be compelled to leave our land, we have no ground to fear we shall leave our God behind us. God's essential omnipresence is a great relief against this circumstance of distress, especially to souls that are cast out where no eye can pity them. Should they be cast into dungeons, as Jeremiah was, yet they can say, 'God is here.'

2dly. It is so likewise with respect to time. The sufferings of the church of God are not tied up to one age or generation. We can see some little comfort and relief that may befall us in our own days; but what shall become of our posterity, of future ages? Why God's immutability is the same throughout all generations; his 'loving-kindness fails not,' as the psalmist saith; which is the only relief against this distress. Alas, if a man should take a prospect of the interest of Christ at this day in the world, and con-

sider the coming on of wickedness like a flood in all parts of the earth, he would be ready to think, What will God do for his great name? What will become of the gospel of Christ in another age? But God is the same through all times and ages.

3dly. There is relief to be found in God, and only in himself, in the loss of all, when nothing remains. Should a man lose his lands, if his house remains, he hath something to relieve him, he knows where to repose his head under his cares. But when all is gone, what can relieve him? Nothing but God and his all-sufficiency. This was Habbakkuk's comfort if all should fail him; yet, saith he, 'I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.'

4thly. The last circumstance of distress, is death, with the way and manner whereby it may approach us: and how soon this will be, we know not. When all this state and frame of things shall vanish, and we prove to have an utter unconcernment in things below; when the curtain shall be turned aside, and we shall look into another world; the soul's relief lies in God's immutability, that we shall find him the same to us in death as he was in life, and much more.

SERMON XL.*

In my former discourse upon this text, I told you, that there were three reasons why faith betakes itself to the nature of God for relief in overwhelming distresses. The first was taken from the circumstances of those distresses; the second from the nature of them; and the third from the nature of faith itself.

I mentioned four circumstances in such distresses that nothing can relieve the souls of men against, but the consideration of God's essential properties, which I shall not here repeat, but proceed to the second reason.

[2.] There are some distresses that in their own nature refuse all relief that you can tender them, but only what is derived from the fountain itself, the nature of God. Zion's distress did so; Isa. xlix. 14. 'Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me.' And, chap. xl. 27. 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.' She was in that distress that nothing but the nature of God could give her relief. God therefore proposeth that unto her: 'Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not?' ver. 28. A man would think sometimes it was no difficult thing to answer those objections which believing souls charge against themselves, even such as we are well and comfortably persuaded are believers. But it frequently falls out quite otherwise, and nothing will bring them to an issue, but the consideration of the infinite grace and goodness that is in God.

Nay, there may be temporal distresses that in their own nature will admit of no other relief. As when the whole church of God is in extreme calamity in the world, which nothing can remove but infinite power, goodness, and wisdom. You know how Moses was put to it when God told him he would deliver Israel out of Egypt. He looked upon it as impossible, and raised objections till it came to that, Exod. iii. 13. If it must be so, tell me thy name. And God revealed his name: 'I am that I am.' Till God con-

* This sermon was preached Nov. 25, 1670.

firmed him with his name, that is, with his nature, Moses could see no way possible how the church should be delivered. And so it falls out with us, as with Moses. When God did not appear, Moses thought he could have delivered them himself, and goes and kills the Egyptian; but when God appeared, he could not believe that God himself could do it, till he gave him his name.

But some may object; When faith comes to approach unto God to find relief as God proposes himself in his name, it will find other things in God besides his goodness, grace, and mercy: there is severity, justice, righteousness in God, which will give as much discouragement on the one hand, as the other properties will give encouragement on the other: to come to God and see him glorious in holiness, and infinite in severity and righteousness, here will be discouragement.

I shall answer this briefly, and so pass on.

1st. It is most true that God is so: he is no less infinitely holy, than infinitely patient and condescending; no less infinitely righteous, than infinitely merciful and gracious: but these properties of God's nature shall not be immediately glorified upon their persons who go unto him, and make their addresses in faith, though he will be so to others. There is nothing but faith can take a proper view of God. Wicked men's thoughts of God are referred unto these two heads: First, They think wickedly, 'that God is altogether such an one as themselves;' Psal. l. 21. While under the power of their corruptions and temptations, while in pursuit of their lusts, they have no thoughts of God, but such as these. The meaning of which is, that he is not much displeased with them in what they do; but hath the same care of them in the way of their sins, as of the holiest in the world. Secondly, Their other thoughts are commonly when it is too late, and God lets his terrors into their souls, what the prophet saith in Isaiah; 'Who of us shall dwell with eternal fire?'

2dly. God hath given believers assurance that he will not deal with them according to the strictness of his holiness, and severity of his justice. So speaks Job, chap. xxiii. 3, 4. 'Oh that I knew where I might find him; that I might come

to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.' But doth he know of whom he speaks? and what this great and holy One will speak when he appears? Yes, ver. 6. 'Will he plead against me with his great power? No, but he will put strength in me.' God will not plead with me by his dread, and terror, and great severity; but he will put strength in me. Therefore, Isa. xxvii. 5. he bids them 'lay hold on his arm.' Who dare lay hold on God's arm? 'Let them lay hold upon my arm that they may have peace, and they shall have peace.' Poor creatures are afraid to go to God because of his power; but 'fury is not in me,' saith God.

3dly. It is impossible for faith ever to consider the nature of God, but it hath a secret respect unto Jesus Christ, as the days-man, or umpire between God and the soul, and as he by whom, as to all that concerns these properties of his nature, his severity and justice, are already manifested and glorified.

[3.] There is one reason more why the soul will thus in overwhelming distresses betake itself unto the nature of God, as manifested by his name; and that is taken from the nature of faith itself. The formal reason of faith is the veracity of God's word. What we believe with divine faith, we believe upon this account, that God hath revealed and spoken it. And the ultimate object of faith is God's all-sufficiency. And whatsoever you act faith immediately upon, it will not rest, and be satisfied, till it comes, as it were, to be immersed in the all-sufficiency of God; like the stream of a river that runs with great swiftness, and presses on till it comes to the ocean, where it is swallowed up. It is said, 1 Pet. i. 21. that through Christ we 'believe in God.' Christ is the immediate object of faith, but God in his all-sufficiency is the ultimate object of faith.

Again, faith acts thus, because it is the great principle of that divine nature which God hath inlaid in our souls, created in us, and whereof he is the Father; for 'of his own will he hath begotten us by the word of truth.' Faith therefore, as it is the child of God, the new nature that God hath ingrafted in us, has a natural tendency towards God; so that it is working in and through all to God himself who is

its Father. This is the first thing that the soul considers in God, that faith makes its application unto for relief.

2. In an overwhelming condition faith finds relief in sovereign grace; that is, grace as it is absolutely free. What I mean by it, is that which is mentioned, Exod. xxxiii. 19. 'I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious, and I will shew mercy upon whom I will shew mercy.' The things we stand in need of, are grace and mercy: the principle from whence they flow, and are bestowed, is the sovereign will and pleasure of God. God refers the dispensation of all grace and mercy merely unto his own sovereign will and pleasure. Now when the soul can find nothing in the promise, nothing in any evidence of the love of God, or in the experience that it hath formerly had, it betakes itself unto the sovereignty of grace. And in sovereign grace there are two things:

(1.) That God is able to give relief in the state and condition wherein we are; whatever we stand in need of, mercy, life, salvation, God is able to give it; whatsoever he will do, he can do. And this in the Scripture is made a great encouragement of rest upon God. Thus Dan. iii. 17. when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in that great and overwhelming distress, what did they relieve themselves withal? 'If it be so,' say they, 'our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' If God 'will not;' it is not, 'if God cannot;' for he can do what he will. If he had not been able, they would not have worshipped him. There is nothing for these sixteen hundred years that hath seemed harder to be effected, than the call of the Jews; but the apostle gives us this ground yet to fix our hopes upon, in the expectation of it: they may be grafted in, 'for God is able to graft them in again;' Rom. xi. 23. The very power of God, that he is able to do whatever he pleases, is a foundation for faith to act upon, and relieve itself by. And therefore God pleads it emphatically, Isa. l. 2, 3. where he tells them, that his hand is not shortened that it cannot save; but he is still able to do it. 'Is my hand shortened at all,' saith he, 'that it cannot redeem?

or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea: I make the rivers a wilderness: I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.'

Now there are four things that are included in this very apprehension of faith, that God is able to do this whatever our condition be.

[1.] There is nothing contrary to his own nature in it. There are things that are contrary to the nature of God, and these things God cannot do. 'God cannot lie;' Tit. i. 2. Heb. vi. 18. It is one part of God's infinite perfection, that he can do nothing contrary unto his own nature. So that whatever I believe is of God's sovereign grace which he is able to do, I believe there is nothing in it contrary unto the nature of God. Whatever apprehensions we have of pardon of sin, it includes an atonement; for without an atonement God is not able to pardon our sins; God cannot do it without satisfaction unto his justice. So that every soul that hath an apprehension that there is sovereign grace in God, whereby he is able to relieve and help him, he includes in that apprehension, the belief of an atonement, without which God cannot do it. He cannot deny himself. It is the judgment of God, that 'they that commit sin are worthy of death.'

[2.] If God be able, there is nothing in it contrary to any decree of God. There are many things that may be contrary to God's decree, that in themselves were not contrary unto his nature; for the decree of God is a free act of his will, which might have been, or not have been. But when the decree of God is engaged, if any thing be contrary unto it, God cannot do it, for he is not changeable.

Now the decree of God may be taken two ways.

1st. For his eternal purpose concerning this or that person or thing. But this I intend not.

2dly. The decree of God signifies 'sententia lata,' 'a determinate sentence,' that God hath pronounced against any person or thing, contrary to which God will not proceed. So Zeph. ii. 2. we are invited to 'seek the Lord, before the decree bring forth;' that is, before God hath passed an absolute and determinate sentence in that matter and case. When Daniel would assure Nebuchadnezzar of his doom, he tells him it was 'the decree of the Most High,'

chap. iv. 24. So in the case of Saul, 'God hath rejected thee,' saith Samuel, 1 Sam. xv. 26. But will he not call it back? No: 'The strength of Israel will not lie,' ver. 29. The sentence is gone forth, and it shall stand. God rejected the house of Eli from the priesthood, 1 Sam. ii. but will he not return again? No: 'The iniquity of the house of Eli shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever;' chap. iii. 14. So it was with them of whom God 'sware in his wrath, they should never enter into his rest.' Now while there is faith in God's sovereignty, if there be no decree in the case, there is hope. But if God had decreed, and put forth his oath, he would not have raised my faith to look after sovereign grace, which declares an ability in God, that he can do it.

[3.] It includes this, That there is nothing in it contrary unto the glory of God; for this is the measure of all that God doth in all his dealings with us; he aims in all things at the manifestation of his glory. And we are not to desire any thing that is contrary to the glory of God. We are not to desire that God would not be holy and righteous because of us, that we might be saved in our sins, and while we are obstinate in them. This is to desire, that God would not be God, that we might live. But now to save an humble, broken, contrite sinner, a poor guilty creature, that lies at his feet for mercy, to deliver poor distressed believers from ruin and oppression, is not inconsistent with the glory of God. God can do this for the advancement of his glory. I have known it go well with some poor souls, when they could come to believe this, that to save and pardon them, was not contrary to God's nature, decree, and glory.

[4.] There is this in it also, That if there be need of power, God can put it forth; that power which carried Abraham through all difficulties; Gen. xviii. 14. 'Is any thing too hard for the Lord?' What is your difficulty? It may be an overwhelming guilt of sin: 'Is any thing too hard for God?' What is your distress? A wicked, prevailing corruption. 'Is any thing too hard for God?' In outward distresses that lie upon the church of God, there is this relief in sovereign grace: 'Is any thing too hard for God?' Every thing is too hard for us, but nothing is too hard for God. This is the first thing in sovereign grace; that God is able.

(2.) If it be so, then all that we have to do is resolved into the will of God. So that all I have to do in this world, is but to go to God, as the leper did unto Christ: 'Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.' If God will, he can pardon, sanctify, save me. And if God will, he can deliver his church and people. Here lies the whole question; it is all resolved into his will.

Now two things ensue after once a poor soul hath resolved all his concerns into the will of God.

[1.] There will be an end put unto all other entangling disputes and dark thoughts, which overwhelm the mind: for now, saith the soul, it is come to this, that my whole condition depends upon God's sovereign pleasure. David somewhere makes his complaint, that he was in the mire. A poor creature is bemired, and the more he plungeth, the faster he sticks. When a soul is in this condition, saith God, 'Be still, and know that I am God;' Psal. xlvi. 10. And now all is rolled upon the will of God.

[2.] When once we can resolve our conditions absolutely without farther dispute into the will of God, innumerable arguments will arise to persuade the soul that God will be willing. I will name some of them.

1st. One is taken from that goodness and graciousness of his nature, which we have been before considering and proposing unto you; and doth now properly in this place occur unto us. Suppose any of us had a business with a man, whom we believe to be a good man, a man that hath something of the image of God upon him, and the matter is to us of great importance, it may be as much as our lives are worth, and he can easily do it without any prejudice or disadvantage unto himself, with one word; can we cast a greater reflection upon this man than to think he will not be willing to do it? that merely to do us a mischief and spite, he will change his own nature, and act contrary to his own principles? Shall we then question the good will of God? Shall we question, when all is resolved into his will, that he will not give us out grace and mercy in time of need? Our Saviour presses this argument, Luke xi. 11—13. and in other places, where he brings the issue as near as possible, telling us, it is not to be expected that a child, who finds nothing but his father's will to hinder, will mistrust his

giving him bread. 'And if ye being evil,' saith he, 'know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' And when we can bring the concerns of God's church and people merely to his will, his own nature will supply us with arguments enough to confirm our expectation that he will do it.

2dly. There is another great argument, when all is brought to the sovereignty of the will of God, which is mentioned, Rom. viii. 32. 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up unto death for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' Shall I question whether God will do this thing or no, considering this great instance of his will? It was his will to send Jesus Christ to die for poor sinners. He did not send him to die in vain, and that his death should be lost. If God were not willing to give out grace and mercy to sinners, wherefore did he send Jesus Christ? Why did he give his own Son out of his bosom? Why did he not spare him, and cause our iniquities to meet upon ourselves? Can God give a greater sign of his readiness to spare sinners, than his dealing with Jesus Christ? That is the second thing which faith considers when it comes unto God for relief in an overwhelming condition; sovereign grace, that God is able, all things are resolved into his will.

3dly. Faith in this matter takes into consideration that one particular property of the grace of God in Christ, which is mentioned, Ephes. iii. 8. 'The unsearchable riches of Christ.' Saith faith, there is more grace and more mercy too in God (for these are God's riches that are here intended) than possibly I can see and look into. Will the mercy that hath been declared unto my faith, the promises that have been discovered and revealed unto me, give me satisfaction? No, they will not. I cannot be satisfied with what I have received; with what discoveries have been made unto me of the grace of God. But, saith the soul, there lie behind unsearchable riches of grace, which I can by no means conceive, which all the world, or all the angels in heaven cannot find out. This is a great relief in an overwhelming condition.

4thly. Once more, faith in such a condition learns to

resolve former experiences, not into its own present condition, but into the unchangeableness of God. And this one thing being wisely managed, is enough to relieve our souls under many overwhelming distresses that do befall us. The psalmist doth so, Psal. lxxvii. He had experience of God; ver. 6. 'I call to remembrance my song in the night.' Compare it with that in Job xxxv. 10. 'Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?' David intends some such intimation of the love and good will of God as made him rejoice in the night season. But what is his state now? He tells you, ver. 2. that it is the 'day of his trouble,' that 'his sores run in the night and cease not, his soul refuses to be comforted.' And, ver. 7, 8, &c. 'Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?' In this grand and overwhelming distress, where doth he find relief? He resolves his experience into the unchangeableness of God, ver. 10. 'This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.' He that gave me that former song in the night season, though now I am nothing but darkness, and ready to fear his mercy is quite gone for ever; yet, he is the same, and he will give in the like experience again: though I am changed, he is not.

3. I should go farther to shew what respect faith in such a condition hath unto the covenant of God; but I cannot now insist upon it.

IV. I thought to have shewn you also in the last place, the difference between the faith of the godly, and that of unbelievers; that which the worst of men will have in God in the time of their distresses; and that relief which true evangelical faith finds in an overwhelming condition. But I see it would take up too much time.

One word of use, and I have done.

Use. This is an overwhelming time; a time wherein many are at the ends of the earth literally, and many metaphorically; a time and season wherein most that fear the Lord are obnoxious to some overwhelming distress or other. Suppose that God hath not let forth upon many at this day an overwhelming sense of guilt, that there are not many

tempted, wounded, and troubled (though some there are which we meet with every day), yet I have great reason to fear, that if we were all rightly awakened, an overwhelming distress would come upon the minds of men from the want of humility, holiness, fruitfulness, faith, and love, which ourselves have sometimes enjoyed, and is proposed unto us, and which the examples of them who are gone before us, lead us to inquire after. Are none overwhelmed with the hardness of their hearts, instability of their spirits, overgrown with careless, empty, light, worldly frames? Truly, more or less, we have all reason to be overwhelmed, and we have shewed you a little where our relief lies in this state and condition.

Are we ready to be overwhelmed with the calamitous condition of the people of God all over the world? and as to ourselves, our goods, and personal concerns, any thing that is near and dear unto us? I pray God make our hearts jealous over it, especially those that are at ease, in their health and prosperity. When God throws others of his people into the furnace, such have great reason to be jealous, lest he deal more severely with them, than the poorest saint that wants a morsel of bread. Well, you see the way of relief in this case also. It is God alone unto whom we must make our application. He is willing to receive us, because of the goodness of his nature; and he is able to save us, because of the abundance of his grace and power.

SERMON XLI.*

A CHRISTIAN, GOD'S TEMPLE.

For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.—2 Cor. vi. 16—18.

THERE are three things in these words:

First, The privilege of believers, especially as they are the church of God. They 'are the temple of the living God, as God hath said.'

Secondly, The duty, which by virtue of that privilege, is incumbent on all believers. 'Wherefore,' saith he, 'come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.'

Thirdly, A promise made unto the due performance of the duty by virtue of that privilege. 'And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

You may well think I shall not speak at large to these things. I intend only so far to touch upon them, as just to lead me to what I think is the present sin of this nation, and what are the causes of the judgments upon it.

In ver. 16. believers are said to be dedicated, consecrated, and made holy to God, as his peculiar lot and portion. And then the use of it is to shew the twofold sin for which judgment cometh upon this nation. The first is, That the nation deals not with them as God's consecrated lot and portion: that is the sin of the nation. The second is, That they behave not themselves as God's consecrated lot and portion: that is the sin of the people of God.

* This sermon was preached March 27, 1674.

I shall spend some time in confirming my foundation. You have it with the ground of it, Rev. v. 9. where the church speaks to Christ, 'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God, kings and priests.' Before the purchase of them by Christ, they lay in the common lot of mankind; they were in the people, and tongues, and kindred, and nations of the earth. Christ makes a purchase of them. He did not die to redeem all, but to redeem some out of all the kindreds, and nations, and tongues under heaven. Upon Christ's making a purchase of them, they are no more their own. 'Ye are bought with a price,' saith the apostle, 'ye are not your own.' Whose then are they? They are Christ's; Rom. xiv. 9. 'For this cause he both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living;' that is, of the whole church, alive and dead, that they might be his. He took them all into his disposal. And what did he do with them? When they were absolutely his own, and in his power to dispose of them as he saw good, he dedicates them to God: 'He makes us kings and priests unto God,' saith he. Christ might have disposed of his purchase another way; but this course he took, he dedicates them unto God. Kings and priests were so, as I shall shew you afterward. The apostle Peter tells us the same of all believers, 1 Pet. ii. 9. 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar,' or purchased 'people.' The same is expressed again, Tit. ii. 14. and in sundry other places which I shall not insist upon. But there is one expression of it which must be taken notice of, and that is where they are called the 'first-fruits unto God;' James i. 18. 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.' And Rev. xiv. he expresses it again, 'These were they that had not defiled themselves, and they were the first-fruits unto God.' When God gave and sanctified all things unto his church of old, he reserved the first-fruits unto himself; these were all to be dedicated to him; every one in his way whereof he was capable; clean beasts by sacrifice; men by redemption, corn and wine by a meat-offering: but God retained all the first-fruits to himself: he laid it upon the land

as a rent charge, that he might keep up his title to the whole. So he tells them, Lev. xxv. 23. 'The land is mine,' saith he, 'and ye are but strangers and sojourners with me.' All the concernment of the church of God are God's. He entertains us in his house, at his table, and sustains us with his ordinances. God took the first-fruits as an acknowledgment that they held all from him; and when he would take them no more, he destroyed the land.

Now God takes believers that they may be a kind of first-fruits unto himself of the creatures. He satisfies himself with believers throughout the world to be first-fruits of the whole creation. And if God should cease from taking these first-fruits, he would destroy the world. To what end should he maintain this fabric at such an expense of power, patience, forbearance, goodness, wisdom, if there came no revenue to him? Now he never took any revenue but the first-fruits. And if any one (as I shall afterward shew) do put forth their hands to this portion of God, he will be sure sorely to revenge it. For the most part this is the state of things among worldly men, the more they have, the readier they are to lay their hands upon the portion of others: but I am sure the more men have throughout the world, the readier they are to lay their hands upon the portion of God. But, saith he, Jer. ii. 3. 'Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord:' they shall contract guilt, and they shall have punishment fall upon them. 'All that devour them shall offend:' if that were all, they would not much care for it: but 'evil shall come upon them,' saith the Lord.

Let us a little inquire how believers come to be dedicated, consecrated, and made holy unto God, to be his temple, tabernacle, first-fruits, his lot and portion, as they are called.

Why this notion is taken from the Old Testament, and it is spoken of in allusion to what was in use there, when both persons and things were dedicated to God.

By what way then were things dedicated and consecrated to God, made his portion, and became holy?

There were four ways whereby this was done.

I. By special call, and legal constitution.

II. By unction.

III. By inhabitation. And,

IV. By vow, and actual separation thereupon.

There is no other way whereby any thing was ever dedicated to God under the Old Testament. And we shall find all these ways believers are dedicated and consecrated unto God.

I. There was a dedication to God by special call, and law constitution. So Aaron was dedicated to God to be a priest, Exod. xxviii. 1. 'Take to thee Aaron and his sons with him from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office.' What was this? 'No man,' saith our apostle, 'takes this honour to himself, unless called of God, as was Aaron.' Aaron was called of God to be dedicated a peculiar priest unto him. And this was confirmed by the law of the priesthood: he 'was made a priest after the law of a carnal commandment,' saith he. And, Numb. i. 50. God took the Levites to the service of the tabernacle, whereby they became his portion: and, chap. iii. 3—5. they are separated upon God's call.

This then is the first way whereby God takes any thing unto himself, and by which any one is separated and dedicated unto God. It is by a solemn call, and legal constitution thereupon.

II. The second way whereby any thing was dedicated unto God, was by unction. So Aaron, after his call, to complete his dedication, chap. xxix. was anointed in his consecration; and so were his sons. In like manner Elisha was anointed to be a prophet in the room of Elijah. And David was anointed to be king over Israel. It was the great consummating ordinance whereby any were dedicated unto God. In Exod. xxx. 22, &c. you have the institution of the making of this oil. 'Ye shall not,' says God, 'make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you. Whosoever compoundeth any like it, shall be cut off from his people, or putteth any of it upon any stranger.' What is the meaning hereof? Why, this anointing oil, wherewith the priests and all the holy utensils of the altar were anointed, was a type of the graces and gifts of the Spirit of God. And where God hath given the gifts and graces of his Spirit for holy ministrations, for praying, for preaching the

word, for administering the ordinances; for any one to make an oil like it by liturgies, homilies, and the like, is to act contrary to this command. All that is done in the whole liturgical, ceremonial course, is nothing but to make an oil like the oil God hath made for his sanctuary, which he doth so severely prohibit any man to put his hand unto, for this reason, because it was a type of the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost that were to be poured out upon Christ, and believers under him.

This is the second way whereby any thing was consecrated unto God.

III. The third way whereby the temple (as believers are peculiarly said to be 'God's temple' in the text and other places) and tabernacle were consecrated, was by inhabitation. God consecrated them unto himself by a glorious inhabitation, and dwelling in them. He came and dwelt in them, thereby they became peculiarly his own. And this God did two ways: 1. By an extraordinary sign of taking first possession of his house, and entering into it, that all might take notice that this was his house; 2. By ordinary constant pledges of his presence.

1. He did it by an extraordinary sign of his taking possession of his house. When the tabernacle was built, and ready to be set apart for service, the glory of the Lord filled it; Exod. xl. It was a dark cloud, for then God dwelt in thick darkness. And, 1 Kings viii. 10. when the temple was built, God came by a glorious sign, and took possession of it. The glory of the Lord filled the temple: and this also was a cloud. God took possession of those houses, the tabernacle and the temple, by a cloud, to signify those types and veils which the people was under, that they could not see to the end of those houses which were to denote the coming of the Son of God to fix his tabernacle among us, by taking human nature upon him.

2. God did it by a visible pledge of his abode and residence. Now this was the ark and the mercy-seat encompassed with the cherubims, which had the direct form of a throne; the ark being supported to such a height, the mercy-seat placed upon that, and the cherubims shading it as arms, had the direct appearance of a throne. Hence the ark is sometimes called 'the glory of God.' It is called 'the King

of glory,' Psal. xxiv. 'Lift up your heads ye everlasting doors, that the King of glory' (that is, the glorious ark which was the type and representation of God's dwelling gloriously in the tabernacle and temple) 'may come in.' There are these two things required to inhabitation; A glorious entrance by an extraordinary sign; and a constant residence by an ordinary pledge: and both these were in the dedication of the temple and tabernacle. And two things ensued thereon.

(1.) A special manifestation of God's glory. Where he dwells there is a special manifestation of his glory. God is everywhere, but is not said to dwell everywhere. He fills heaven and earth by his omnipresence; but God's dwelling signifies something more; not only his being, his essential, eternal being, but the manifestation of that being also. So heaven is said to be his dwelling-place and throne, because God doth most gloriously manifest himself to those creatures of light, his holy saints and angels, that come to the enjoyment of him. In the tabernacle, and in the temple, there was such a manifestation of God's glorious presence continually: this made them holy. And hence it is, that if all the men in this world should agree together to build a glorious fabric for the worship of God, suppose at Jerusalem; and when they had done, dedicate it to God with all the power they have, they cannot make it holy, unless God come to take possession of it by a visible pledge of his presence, and appoint a token of his presence to be in the place. The very notion that some men have, though you may think there is little in it, that they can dedicate any thing to God, hath been the greatest ruin that ever befell religion in this world. It hath wholly cast out all apprehensions of God's portion from the minds of men, and erected another portion for God which was never called, never anointed, never inhabited by God himself. And that hath occasioned men who contract the guilt of persecuting God's only dedicated portion, to put the notion of sacrilege upon tithes and titles, and I know not what, that God never dedicated, nor put his name upon, nor ever took possession of. There is no dedication to God, but it must be by these means. And,

(2.) The special worship of God must by God himself be confined unto it. And truly we have great reason, considering what conflicts and contests are befallen us in these latter

days, which only divine wisdom could foresee, to bless our dear Lord Jesus Christ for that good word of liberty he gave us: 'The day cometh that neither at Jerusalem, nor in this nor that mountain, men shall worship God; but he that worships God, let him worship him in spirit and in truth.' This sets us at liberty from all ways, places, and forms of men's finding out, and dedication.

That is the third way.

IV. There is one way more, and that is, by special vow of things that are in our power, giving them up to God according to his mind. So did Jacob, Gen. xxviii. 22. 'Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.' Men are usually very tenacious of what they have got, they are loath to part with any portion of it, no not to God himself; therefore doth Jacob so well express it here, 'Of all that thou shalt give me, I will give the tithe to thee.' If ever Jacob had any thing God did not give him, that was all his own, and so he knew full well; for when he comes to call over this business again, he remembers, that 'with his staff he went over Jordan, but God had now made him two bands.' When men gave to God according to his mind, of things in their own power, they were under the law, made holy unto the Lord.

Now, I say, believers are dedicated, consecrated to God, and become his portion by all these several ways.

First, They are so by calling, which was the first way God calls them out of the world to be a peculiar portion unto himself. Rom. i. 7. They are 'called to be saints,' and separated unto God. So likewise, 1 Cor. i. 2. Now though this calling doth also imply effectual, internal vocation, whereby the heart and nature is really sanctified; yet it also includes an external separation and dedication unto God. Christ redeems us out of the world, and he calls us out of the world. An obediential compliance with that call of God for separation from the world, makes us to be God's dedicated portion. 'Come out from among them and be separate,' saith God. If we live in the world, after the manner of the world; if we are like the world in our ways and walk, in our affections and conversation, we have no reason to look upon ourselves as the dedicated portion of God. He that is so, brethren, that is thus called to be God's, he endures the world, and doth his own duty in it,

and that is all his concern. I say, he endures the world. That which is the world, and properly so, hath nothing pleasing to him, only he doth his own duty in it. If we intend to be at all interested in this great privilege here, let us secure ourselves that we are God's portion by calling, that we have complied with his call to separate ourselves from the world. The people of God dwelt alone of old, and were not reckoned amongst the nations. Our mixtures in the world, our conformity to the world, our touching of the unclean thing, is the sin of professors at this day, whereby they are concerned in procuring all the judgments that God is pouring out upon the land.

Secondly, Believers are made God's peculiar portion, and are dedicated to him by unction. I will first shew that they are anointed, and then how they are anointed.

1. The apostle says, 2 Cor. i. 21. 'He that hath established us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God.' And you know that place, 1 John ii. 20. 27. 'We have an unction from the Holy One; and the anointing which ye received of him, abideth in you.' It is plain, therefore, that believers are anointed. God in his providence did suffer that name to go upon us, that we should be called Christians, which is in English, 'anointed ones.' That is the name of God's people in the world. How well we answer that name, many of us may do well to consider.

2. We cannot know how we were anointed, how we became Christians, but by considering how our head was anointed, how Jesus became Christ. Christ was anointed: Isa. lxi. 1. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the Lord hath anointed me.' Heb. i. 9. 'God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.' Wherein consisted the unction of the Messiah? the anointing of the Most Holy? which was prophesied of, Dan. ix. 24. How did Jesus become Christ? Truly I have elsewhere so largely insisted upon the communication of the Spirit of God to the human nature of Christ, how, and for what end, that I shall not here speak to it again. In a word, it was the gift of the Spirit of God, with his gifts and graces in an immeasurable manner to the human nature of Christ: 'For God giveth not the Spirit unto him by measure;' John iii. 34. So he is therefore said to be 'anointed with the oil of glad-

ness above his fellows.' How to his fellows? Eph. iv. 7. 'To every one of us is grace given, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' All believers have their measure. He had no measure. This anointing consists in the communication of the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost to all believers. This is our unction, thence we are called Christians. And those who despise the Spirit of God, and his graces and gifts, will find little relief in calling themselves Christians, another day.

But how doth this anointing dedicate believers unto God? It doth it two ways.

(1.) It gives a peculiar interest unto God in them, which is not in any others. Where there are the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God, there God hath something that is not in any part of the world beside: it is indeed the way whereby God takes possession of any soul; he comes and deposits this treasure there. There is my treasure, saith God, I lay it up there, and thereby I take possession of this soul to be mine.

(2.) Every thing dedicated to God, was to be employed in the service of God. And this anointing makes us able to serve God according to his mind and will, when we can do so no otherwise. There is no serving of God without the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost. God abhors all service proceeding from any thing else.

Thirdly, By inhabitation: the Spirit of God dwells in believers. I must say of this also, as I did of what went before; I have shewn so at large how the Spirit of God dwells in, and inhabits in believers, and how they are his temple and tabernacle, that I shall not speak more to it now, but only apply to the case of believers what was said before, that wherever God inhabits, he first takes possession in a cloud, and dwells in a visible pledge of his presence.

1. When God converts a soul, he comes into it with a cloud. I know nothing in this world that I would be more jealous of in my ministry, than of speaking any thing in conversion or regeneration, that I had not experience of myself. I would not bind others by any experience of my own, unless it be confirmed by a general rule. For one man may have an experience that another hath not. And we ought to be wonderful tender in giving out any thing that should be

found in persons as to conversion, and regeneration, if we have not a general rule for it, as well as our own experience. But yet, I think, this I can say, that God generally takes possession of souls in a cloud; that is, there is some darkness upon them, they cannot tell what their state is, sometimes they have hopes, and sometimes fears; sometimes they think things are well, and sometimes they are cast down again. This is the way whereby God generally enters into all souls. These things may be in part where God doth not come; but seldom have I heard of any that have come unto God, but that God first took possession of them in a cloud.

2. God doth it by some visible pledge of his presence, when the cloud is over; for the cloud is but for a season, though it may continue upon some longer than upon others. I have shewn before, that the pledge of God's visible presence in the temple and tabernacle, was the ark and the mercy-seat, formed into the fashion of a throne, with cherubims; which was a type of Jesus Christ. The ark had the law, and the mercy-seat was propitiatory, covering the law from the eye of justice, and so atonement was made. And this was a type of Christ.

How then doth God dwell in the hearts of believers by constant residence? When Christ is enthroned in the heart; and we can have no farther pledge of it. There may be a great deal of duty, careful and wary walking, and a great deal of profession; but if Christ be not upon the throne in the heart, there is no pledge of God's dwelling there. So God dedicates his people by inhabition.

Fourthly, The last way whereby any thing was dedicated unto God, was by vow and covenant. Now we are all of us under a twofold dedication to God by vow and covenant. The one in general, whereof the token is baptism. And we are likewise under a particular vow and dedication as we are a church. What, I pray, is our engagement to walk with God in professed subjection to all the ordinances of Christ, but to give up ourselves to God by vow and covenant to be his, by a dedication of ourselves according to God's appointment and mind? God help us to look unto it, every one of us in our several places and stations. There is more in these things than we are aware of.

Now as there was never any other way whereby any

thing could be dedicated to God, and believers being all these ways dedicated unto him, they become his peculiar portion. They shall be mine, saith God. They are God's kings, priests, tabernacle, temple, sacrifice; 'yield your bodies a living sacrifice.' And they are God's first-fruits, called so expressly.

There are two uses follow necessarily from hence.

Use 1. If believers, especially as they are in church relation, which adds the last hand of dedication by particular church vow and covenant to be God's; if believers, I say, are thus God's peculiar portion, dedicated unto him, it is not in my power to give warning unto the world, to take heed how they meddle with this portion of God. They do not, they will not hear me; and if I could speak unto them, it would rather provoke them, than cure them. But give me leave to say this, and to give glory and honour unto God therein, that among all the sins that so reign in the nation at this day, and have done so for a long season, that which hath peculiarly stirred up the displeasure of God against the nation, so as to threaten us with spiritual judgments, the giving us up to popery, which men are afraid of, and with temporal judgments of all sorts whatever, hath been the violence that hath been done to God's portion all this nation over. Other sins are great and provoking, but God hath given the earth to the children of men; 'He endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.' He will bear with men in all their abominations, leave them for many ages, in many places of the world, to sport themselves in the earth, like the leviathan in the waters. But when a nation comes (as it hath been the sin of this whole nation, from one end to the other) to put forth its hand against God's portion, tearing, rending, destroying, imprisoning, banishing, starving the remainder of God's heritage, it is the cause (let it be spoke to the glory of God, and that which God will own at the last day) why wrath is gone out against us. This hath not been done in a corner by some few, at some certain time. We have known the day when the whole nation, as one man, was on fire to consume the residue of God's heritage, it was the sin of the nation, from one end of it unto the other; saith God, 'All that devour her shall offend, evil shall come upon them.' There hath

been a great devouring of God's first-fruits, and truly in such a manner that we have no greater cause to mourn this day, than that we have not been sensible of it as we ought to be, how these first-fruits of God have been devoured. But they shall offend, and evil shall come upon them. It is the very word that God speaks to the nation this day, if I understand any thing of the will of God in these matters. He speaks so again, Jer. xii. 14. 'Thus saith the Lord against all my evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit, Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them.' What is the inheritance God hath caused us to inherit? It is his ordinances, his ways and worship; it is not the great things of this world; let all take their portion and lot, as God in his providence directs. The inheritance which God causeth Israel to inherit, is his ways and worship, the purity of his ordinances, and their serving Christ in them. This is our inheritance. Saith God, 'I will pluck up my evil neighbours, that will not leave my inheritance.' Let them take what is their own; but they will not leave my inheritance. That generation of vipers, those evil neighbours of God's inheritance everywhere, that have been devouring it, and taking of it away, their doom is read in the prophet, and will come upon them in God's appointed time. The great sin that is upon the nation, and which we ought to bewail, and be humbled for, is the violence they have done to God's portion. It hath not been done by this and that person; no man hath cared for Zion, none hath pitied her, there have been none to plead her cause, none to relieve her, while her friends have died in prisons, been impoverished, banished, &c.

Use 2. There are sins with us, even with us also against the Lord our God. And our great sin is this, that notwithstanding all the violence that hath been shewed us, all the fears, troubles, perplexities that we have undergone, yet we have not been willing to come out from among them, and be separate, but we have cleaved greatly to the unclean thing. There may be a time, and there hath been, when God calls his people to a local separation. So he did to his people in Babylon; 'Come out of her, my people.' And we can remember the day when God carried many of his people out of this nation into a wilderness, and there hid them for a

season. They were under the call of God to a local separation. I see no ground for that now. God binds men down by his providence to their stations; relation and duty bind them down to bear a testimony to the ways of Christ, against all those wicked oppositions that are made unto them. But to separate more in the holiness of our lives and conversations, to keep more from the uncleannesses and vanities of the world, all the abominations of it; God's call is upon us all for this. These two things being thus met together, viz. violence upon the portion of Christ, upon God's separate ones; and neglect of duty in those separate ones, to separate themselves more and more from the world. Who can save? Who can deliver? and what can be our expectation while this frame doth abide? I wish I had a little more time to press this upon us, that if we intend to be made partakers of the last thing in my text, which is the promise that God will 'receive us, and be a Father to us,' and use us as his sons and daughters; if we would be made partakers of it, when an apprehension of an interest in it, will be worth ten thousand times more than all this world can afford; then let us stir up ourselves to this great duty of farther and daily separation from the world in things moral and spiritual, in our minds, in our spirits, in our ways, in our whole course; that if it be the will of God, there may be some interposition for the saving of the land.

SERMON XLII.*

GOSPEL CHARITY.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.—Col. iii. 14.

THE word ἀγάπη, which we here translate 'charity,' is the only word used in the New Testament to signify 'love.' And I wish we had always rendered it so, because in our common use of speech, charity is restrained to one effect of love in relieving the poor and afflicted, which is nowhere the sense of the word in Scripture. It is love then that is intended. 'Above all these things put on love.' There is no grace nor duty but the exercise and practice of it is commanded in the Scriptures, and most of them fall under particular commands, and are enjoined absolutely; but there is but this one, that I remember, which hath a preference given unto it in a command above other things, as here, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις, 'Above all these things put on love:' so 1 Pet. iv. 8. πρὸ πάντων, 'Before all things have fervent love among yourselves.' And so in that of our apostle, 1 Cor. xii. 31. he had given them directions about the use and improvement of spiritual gifts for the edification of the church (and it is an excellent way to have the church edified by the due and orderly exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost in the elders and members); but when he hath done, he adds, 'Behold I yet shew you a more excellent way:' and that is this duty of love, as he shews in the next chapter. It is not only commanded, but it hath a special eminency and excellency put upon it in reference to all other duties for some certain end.

That which I shall at present discourse upon, is this:

Observation. Love, and its exercise, is the principal grace and duty that is required among, and expected from, the saints of God, especially as they are engaged in church-fellowship.

* This sermon was preached June 5, 1673, upon the uniting of Mr. Caryl's church with the Doctor's.

I shall not prove it in general, but speak to these three things:

I. I shall shew you the nature of this love that is thus signalized in the gospel precept.

II. Give you the reasons of the necessity and importance of it, by mentioning some of them the Scriptures give.

III. Lay down some directions for its practice.

I. Concerning the first we may observe, that the love here intended is the second great duty that was brought to light by the gospel. There is nothing of it in the world, neither as to the degree, nor as to the knowledge of it, but what proceeds from the gospel. The world neither hath it, nor knows what it is. Variance, strife, wrath entered by sin; for when we fell off from the love of God, and from his love to us, it is no wonder if we fell into all hatred and variance among ourselves. The love of God was originally in the state of innocency, the bond of perfection; when that was broke, all the creation fell into disorder; all mankind in particular into that state described by the apostle, Tit. iii. 3. 'Living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' There is carnal and natural love still in the world, that follows necessarily upon natural relations; and the same is in some degree in brutes themselves. There is also a love that arises from a society in sin, in pleasure, from a suitableness of humour in conversation, or of design as to political ends, to which heads you may reduce all the love in the world; but all these are utter strangers from this evangelical love. And therefore, when it was brought to light by the gospel, there was nothing so much amazed the heathen world, as to see this new love among Christians. It was even a proverb among them: 'See how they love one another.' To see persons of different sorts, different nations, tempers, degrees, high and low, rich and poor, all knit together in love, was the great thing that amazed the heathen world. And I shall shew you the grounds of it afterward.

You may likewise observe, that this love is the means of communion between all the members of the mystical body of Christ, as faith is the instrument of their communion with their head Jesus Christ. And therefore our apostle doth seven or eight times in his epistle join faith and love toge-

ther, as the entire means of the communion and fruitfulness of the mystical body of Christ. And in one place he hath so ordered his words, to shew their inviolableness and indissolubleness, that you must make a distribution of them to gather their right sense. It is in Philemon, ver. v. 'Hearing of thy love, and of thy faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and towards all the saints.' A man would think that both the objects relate to both the duties, faith and love towards Christ, and towards all the saints. But though Christ be the object of our love also, the saints are not the object of our faith: so that you must make a distribution of the words: 'Hearing of thy faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and of thy love towards all the saints.' But the apostle so places them to shew how indissoluble these things are, that they must go together; where the one is, there will be the other; and where the other is not, there that will not be. It is therefore the life, and soul, and quickening form of all duties that are performed among believers toward one another. Whatever duties you do perform, be they never so great and glorious, never so useful one to another, to any of the members of Christ; if they are not quickened and animated by this love, they are of no value to thy communion with Christ, and edification of the church. And men may perform many things that appear to be duties of love, without love. In the two verses before the text, saith the apostle, 'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. But above all these things put on love.' So that all these things may be, yet not love. Those which seem to be the greatest and most effectual fruits of love whatever, yet they may be all without love. We may forbear without love, forgive without love, be kind to one another without love; and all this of no use, if above all these things, over and upon them, we do not superinduce love, if we be not quickened and acted by love. The truth is, he that shall read over the New Testament, especially those things which we have most reason particularly to consider in it, which are the special instructions and commands that Christ left unto his disciples when he was going out of this

world, would think this same love, whatever it be, is the sum and substance of all that Christ required of us, as indeed it is. And the apostle John, who lived long, and lived to see the Christian religion much propagated in the world, and very probably saw a decay of love, wrote his First Epistle almost to this very end and purpose, to let us know, that there was neither truth of grace, nor evidence of the love of God to us, nor of our love to God, unless there was fervent and intense love towards the brethren. Whatsoever we think of our profession, if there be not an intense love unto the brethren, we have neither the truth of grace, nor evidence of God's love to us, or of our love to God.

But you will say then, What is this love?

I answer briefly, It is a fruit of the Spirit of God, an effect of faith, whereby believers, being knit together by the strongest bonds of affection, upon the account of their interest in one head, Jesus Christ, and participating of one spirit, do delight in, value, and esteem each other, and are in a constant readiness for all those regular duties, whereby the temporal, spiritual, and eternal good of one another may be promoted.

I will a little open the description I have given of it, and so proceed.

1. This love, concerning which I speak, is a fruit of the Spirit: Gal. v. 22. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love.' There may be, and is implanted in some natures, a great deal of love, kindness, and tenderness, in comparison of others that are froward; but that is not the love here intended. That which renders it peculiarly gospel love, is its being the product of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Truly I cannot turn aside to every particular, to shew how we may know whether love be a fruit of the Spirit, or arising from our own natural inclination. But you must inquire into it upon those general rules that are given to discern and distinguish such things. This only I say, it is a fruit of the Spirit, a product of the Holy Ghost in us, or it belongs not to our work.

2. It is an effect of faith. So saith the apostle: 'Faith worketh by love.' How doth faith work by love? How doth faith set love on work? When it respects God's command requiring this love, his promise accepting it, and his glory whereunto this love is directed; then doth faith work by

love. And it is not the love we aim at, which we design and press upon you, if it proceed upon any other account but this, because Christ commands it, and promises to accept it, and because it lies in a tendency to his glory. Self may work by love sometimes; flesh, interest, or reputation may work by love, that is, by the fruit of it; but it is that love which faith worketh by, that we alone intend.

3. It is that love which doth knit together the hearts and souls of believers with entire affection one unto another. For the apostle tells us, Eph. iv. 16. speaking of that communion which the church hath by love, 'The whole body is fitly joined together, and compact, by that which every joint and part supplieth.' Now we can supply nothing to one another but by love, and from thence issues delight and esteem. 'All my delight,' saith he, 'is in the saints,' Psal. xvi. 2. 'and in them that excel in the earth.' And there is that valuation, that we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren; that is, to be willing to expose ourselves to difficulties and dangers, our lives to hazard, yea, to lay them down, if the edification of the church so require. The martyrs of old did not lay down their lives for Christ personally only, but for Christ mystical; they not only laid them down in faith, but in love, love to the church. The apostle saith of all his afflictions, 'I fill up the measure of the afflictions of Christ, for his body which is the church.' He bore his afflictions out of love to the church, as well as out of faith and love to Christ personally, that there might be no offence, scandal, or temptation befall the church. That their faith might be confirmed and strengthened, was a great reason why the martyrs laid down their lives. And it should be so with us if we come to be called thereunto. This is that love which the Scripture speaks of, and not that careless, negligent, carnally influenced love which the world, I had almost said, nay, I will say it, which too many professors abound withal, and no more. And it was a task not for one sermon, but many discourses, to shew what are the duties that his love requires of us, and will put us upon; how it will influence all our walkings, direct us in all our ways, in our whole course and conversation, and all that we do.

It may be asked, seeing all believers are the objects of this love, How are we to exercise it towards them, since there

are few of them we know, and are acquainted withal, and that we have a satisfaction in their state and condition, that they are such; few, that we know their occasions, straits, and necessities?

I answer,

(1.) The whole mystical body of Christ being the adequate object of gospel love, of love in and by the Holy Ghost, it is indispensably required of us, that radically and habitually we have an equal love unto all believers, as such, unto all the disciples of Christ throughout the world. But this is accompanied with some limitations.

[1.] In the exercise of it, it will much answer the evidence that persons are interested in the mystical body of Christ. There are some whose vain opinions, and indeed corrupt practices, will exercise the most extensive charity to judge they belong unto the mystical body of Christ. Yet, according unto our evidence, so is our love to be.

[2.] There may be degrees in our love, especially as to delight and valuation, according as we see more or less of the image of Jesus Christ upon any believer; the likeness and image of Christ being the formal reason of this love.

[3.] The exercise of love must be determined by occasions and opportunities. But with these three qualifications, a man may pronounce he is no believer who hath not habitually and radically a love to all the believers in the world, so as to be inwardly concerned in their good and evil, and to be influenced unto prayer, compassion, delight, and joy, according as their state and condition doth require.

(2.) There is required an inclination and readiness to all acts of love towards all believers, as opportunity shall be administered. If we turn away our face from our brother, and hide ourselves from him, how dwells the love of God in us? If there be a real love in any of us of this kind, let it be but heightened and advantaged by an opportunity, it will break through difficulties, through reasonings, pleas of flesh and blood to the exercise of itself. As they that know any thing in this world, know that as the first great opposition of hell, the world, and corrupt nature, is against faith to God by Christ; so the next great opposition made against us, is against our love. If we do not understand this, we are unwise, and have not considered the various states and condi-

tions of things in this world; and how every moment things are presented unto us with a tendency to the weakening of love upon one account or other. But,

(3.) Our Lord Jesus Christ in infinite wisdom, tenderness, and condescension, hath provided us a safe, suitable, constant, immediate object for the exercise of this love. Having given so great a command as that of love, and laid so great weight upon it, he will not leave us at an uncertainty, how, or where, or when we shall exercise it; but hath directed us to a particular way wherein he will make a trial of our obedience unto the command in general; and this is, by his institution of particular churches. There are two great ends why Christ did institute a particular church, and they were to express the two great graces and duties that he requires of us.

[1.] The first end why Christ did institute a particular church was, that his saints together might jointly profess their faith in him, and obedience to him. And we have no other way of doing it: he hath tied us up to this. A blessed way! You shall this way, saith he, jointly profess your faith in me, and obedience to me, or no way.

[2.] The next great end why he did institute a particular church was, that we might have a direct exercise of his other great command, and of that other great duty of love to believers. I will try you here, saith Christ, I require this of you indispensably, to love all the saints, all believers, all my disciples. You shall not need to say, you must go far, this way, or that for objects; I appoint you to such an order, as wherein you shall have continual, immediate objects of all that love which I require of you. When God gives commands that great things turn upon, and are general, he gives some particular instance wherein he will have our obedience tried to those commands. When he gave the great command at first in the state of innocency, he tried them in the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. The Lord Jesus Christ hath given us this great command of love, and hath plainly declared, that if we love not one another, we are not his disciples. I will give you an instance whereby you may be tried, saith he, cast you into such a society by my order and appointment, as wherein you may have immediate objects for the exercise of love, to the utmost of

what I do require. If we find a person that is orderly admitted into church-society, he is as certain and evident an object of our love, as if we saw him lying in the arms of Christ. We walk by rule; he hath appointed us to do so. Let none then pretend that they love the brethren in general, and love the people of God, and love the saints, while their love is not fervently exercised towards those who are in the same church-society with them. Christ hath given it you for a trial: he will try your love at the last day by your deportment in that church wherein you are. The apostle tells us, 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, will never love God whom he hath not seen.' I am sure I may say, he that exercises not love towards the brethren whom he doth see in that relation wherein Christ hath appointed him to exercise love, loves not the brethren whom he doth not see, and that he hath not that peculiar relation to, and acquaintance withal. The great Lord and guide of his church binds it upon all our spirits and consciences; it is our life, our being. I declare unto this congregation this day, I witness and testify unto you, that unless this evangelical love be found acted, not loosely and in general, but among ourselves mutually towards each other, we shall never give up our account with joy unto Jesus Christ, nor shall we ever carry on the great work of edification among ourselves. And if God be pleased but to give this spirit among you, I have nothing to fear but the mere weakness and pravity of my own heart and spirit. This is the great way Christ hath given us to exemplify our obedience unto that great and holy command of love to his disciples; and great weight is laid upon this duty.

II. The next thing I am to speak to, is to shew you the grounds why this love is so necessary: 'Before all these things have love: I shew you a more excellent way,' and that is love. There would be no end if I should insist long upon the grounds and reasons of this duty. I will give you some of them that are of weight and importance unto me. Do but carry this along with you, that what I speak about love, is to be exercised first among ourselves, and then to have emanations upon all opportunities and occasions to the whole mystical body of Christ throughout the world.

1. It is necessary, because it is the great way whereby

we can give testimony to the power of the gospel, and our witness to the Messiah, the Christ that was sent of God. The great thing we have to do in the world, is to bear witness unto God's sending Christ into the world for the work for which he came. How shall we do this? He himself shews us, John xvii. 21. 23. 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.' And again, ver. 23. 'I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; that the world may know that thou hast sent me.' Jesus Christ lays the weight upon this, that the world may be convinced that God hath sent him. How shall this be evidenced? saith he, if all believers are one it will be evidenced. There is, I acknowledge, another principle of the oneness of them that believe, by a participation of that one Spirit of the Father and the Son, whereby we come to be one in the Father and the Son. But that is not the whole oneness; nay, I do not think it is at all the oneness here intended: and my reason is this, because it is perfectly invisible and imperceptible unto the world; and he prays for such a oneness as may convince the world, that the world may see that they are one, and so believe that God had sent him. It is no oneness but that whereof love is the bond of perfection, the life, and soul, and spirit of it, that will give conviction unto the world that God hath sent Christ. And if this be not eminent in us, we do what lies in us to harden the world in their unbelief. Persons that profess the gospel, some way or other, have framed unity and uniformity to themselves, and neglecting this oneness of love under them, hath been the greatest means of hardening the world in unbelief. What great matter is there in this, saith the world? I can make such a union when I list; it is but making such and such laws about outward observations, and tie men to the observance of them. But the union of love no man can give but Jesus Christ. And why will this convince the world that God hath sent Christ when the disciples do so love one another? Where lies the argument? From what topic do you argue to prove God hath sent Christ, because his disciples do so love one another? It lies in this, as I told you before, when sin entered, the bond of all union and perfection among the

creatures was quite broken by the loss of love; the whole world was irrecoverably cast under envy, wrath, 'hateful, and hating one another.' Nothing under heaven, no means in us could retrieve men unto love again, to pure spiritual love. God sends Christ to retrieve this loss, to bring in a new creation, to bring things into order, to renew the world, and the face of things. That glorious part of the work wrought in the heart of man, is invisible; that which is visible is love. The world sees here a new union brought forth among Christ's disciples, such as is not in the world, nor of the world, such as the world doth not partake of; by this they know that God hath sent Christ to do this great work. The care, kindness, condescension, love, delight, and concernment we have in one another, as members of the mystical body of Christ, exemplified in our peculiar church relation, is the great testimony we give to the world that God hath sent Christ, and they will be forced to see, or say at last, A glorious work is done upon these persons 'that were foolish and disobedient, living in divers lusts and pleasures, hateful, and hating one another;' a glorious work hath been done by the Son upon them, and we profess it is from Christ, from God's sending him for this end and purpose.

2. We have no evidence that we ourselves in particular are the disciples of Christ without it. John xiii. 34, 35. 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' I have a little inquired why this command of love is here and in other places called a new commandment. I told you before when sin entered into the world, envy and hatred entered with it, and it is continued upon the same account. 'Whence come wars and fightings,' saith the apostle, 'is it not from your lusts that war in your members?' In the first revelation God gave of himself in the law, he commanded love. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us so, that we are commanded to 'love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.' Whence then is this command so often called a new commandment? 'A new commandment I give you, That ye love one another,' saith he.

There are divers reasons of it.

(1.) I judge one may be this, That under the law God did indulge that carnal people in sundry things wherein they came short of the royal law of love, by reason of the hardness of their hearts. When Christ comes and gives this command in its full extent, it was a new command. Again,

(2.) They were carnal, and did not see the spirituality of the command. And the truth of it is, you hear so little of it in the Old Testament, and so much of it in the New, that Christ may justly call it a new command. Besides,

(3.) At the time when he came, there were cursed expositions of the law that went current in the whole church, which had overthrown the whole duty of love between the brethren and members of it; as you may see in our Saviour's vindicating of it, Matt. v. But Christ coming to take off all indulgence to carnal men, by reason of the hardness of their hearts, and to take away the darkness that was upon their minds, whereby they could not see the spirituality of the command, and to remove those false expositions that were put upon the law corrupting the command; he calls it a new commandment.

(4.) Above all these, there is one reason more for it, which lies here in the words I before read unto you: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you love one another.' The reason why it was a new commandment was, because there was no quickening, enlivening example of it, to express the power of love, under the Old Testament. This was reserved for Christ. He comes and gives that glorious instance of love in his condescension in all that he did, and in all that he suffered. He shews that there was something in love that they never before had an instance of in the world. Whence the command for love lies thus: 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus: That you love one another, as I have loved you.' And then it is a new commandment indeed, which it was not before. 'Hereby,' saith he, 'men shall know that ye are my disciples;' if the great example I have set you, the great command I have given you, and the great work I came into the world about,

was to renew love; by love men will know that ye are my disciples, and not else. We have no other way to evidence ourselves to be disciples of Christ. Men's parts, gifts, wisdom, will not do it; if there be no love, the world has no reason to conclude that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. It is that wherein the communion of saints doth principally consist. There is great talk about communion of saints, and certainly it is a great thing. We may observe it had a place in all the ancient creeds of the church: where they profess to believe in God, in Christ, and in the Holy Ghost, they profess also to believe the communion of saints, which shews it to be a thing of great importance.

Wherein doth it consist? There are three things in it: (1.) The fountain and spring of it; (2.) The profession and explanation of it; (3.) The formal reason and life of it.

(1.) The fountain and spring of the communion of saints lies in their common participation of one Spirit from the one head Jesus Christ. And you may as soon form a good society among dead men, as work a communion among professors, where it is not fundamentally laid in a common participation of the same Spirit with the head Christ.

(2.) This communion is expressed principally in the participation of the same ordinances in the same church. This is the great expression of the communion of saints.

(3.) The life and formal reason of this communion, which derives strength from the fountain, and communicates it into that expression and profession, lies in love.

Truly I have a little jealousy upon my spirit, that churches have been apt to place their communion too much, if not solely, in the participation of the same ordinances, depending upon the same pastor and teacher, joining together in the celebration of the same sacred institutions. Friends, this is but the expression of our communion, and it may be without any real communion. There may be a communication in the same ordinances, without any communion of saints; you know it is too much in the world. If we be not acted and influenced by this love in all we do, there is no communion. So far you are faithful unto your station in the church of God, so far you discharge your duty,

and act as living members of the church, as you find love acting in you towards one another, and no farther. Your utmost diligence in attending unto order, your constant attendance at the celebration of ordinances, your dependance on the doctrine and instructions afforded in the church, may all be without communion of saints. When you have all this, it is love makes this communion, that is the life and formal reason of it; as you may see in the place before quoted, Eph. iv. 15, 16. 'But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.' It is the greatest and most glorious description of the communion of saints, that we have in the Scripture. It begins in love; 'Speaking the truth in love:' and it ends in love; 'Edifying itself in love.' And it is also carried on by love. There is the fountain and spring of this communion, that lies in the head, in our relation unto, and dependance upon, Christ the head. If we hold not the head, we can have no interest in this communion. But it is not enough there be a head, there must be 'a growing up into him in all things who is the head. We shall never carry on the work of communion, unless we grow up into Christ, by express dependance on him, deriving life and strength from him, and returning all unto his praise and glory as our head, being thereby brought nearer, and made more like unto him. The exercise of faith in these things, is our growing up into Christ. Suppose then we go thus far in the business of communion; we hold the head by faith; and by the exercise of faith and obedience grow up into the head; What is next? 'From whom the whole body is fitly framed together.' There will be such supplies from the head Christ, being thus held and grown up into, as will communicate such variety of gifts and graces as shall suit the body, and every member one to another. But how are believers cast into church-union and order? I will not say how they are not: I know what attempts there are in the world. I will plainly tell you how they are. It is by the various communications of Christ the head unto them all, fitting and suiting them to one another.

What do they then themselves herein? They are of two sorts, either joints or other parts. May be they are joints, that is, either officers, or principal members, who by reason of their gifts, yield a supply to the communication of the effects of those gifts and graces they have received, carrying on farther this supply that is received from the head. What shall become of the other members? Not only the joints, but every part doth so, according to the measure of each. The graces and gifts of Christ cast every member into what part it bears. Let none of us choose our own part in the house of God. The graces and gifts of Christ cast us into each part, or joint, and from thence do we supply, according to the measure of that part: and no more is required of us. But how shall we do this? Why, saith he, ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, 'Speaking the truth in love.' The plain meaning of which is, That whatever we do in declaring, or obeying the truth; in preaching, or in a way of duty, we do it all in love. It is not merely speaking, or declaring, but it is a doing whatever we do in obedience to the truth. Whatever your concern is in the truths of the gospel, let love be acted in it; and that is the means whereby you convey your supplies from every joint and part unto the whole. Truth requires our pity, compassion, admonition, exhortation, forbearance, and the like; do it all in love, saith he. How then? 'The body will be increased, and edify itself in love.' It is all love. I have sometimes thought that ἐν ἀγάπῃ, 'in love,' may be taken for διὰ ἀγάπης, 'by love:' 'Shall edify itself by love.' But take it as we have rendered it: 'Edify itself in love;' that is, love in the body shall be increased, and where love is increased, there the body is edified. A church full of love, is a church well built up. I had rather see a church filled with love a thousand times, than filled with the best, the highest, and most glorious gifts and parts that any men in this world may be made partakers of. Could they go beyond and exceed all we aim at or desire; could they 'speak with the tongues of men and angels; it is ten thousand times more for the glory of God, and our own comfort, to be a company of poor saints, who are filled with love, than with those of the highest attainments, without it. We neither give testimony unto the world that God sent Christ, nor evidence that we are his

disciples, nor do we contribute any thing to the edification of the church, unless God give us to act this grace of love in an abundant measure. Whatever our gifts and parts are, and whatever our wisdom is, such things are apt to puff us up, if this love abound not in us; we shall be thorns in the sides of one another, and shall contribute nothing unto the real, spiritual edification of the church. The apostle hath not only laid this down, but so disputed it in the twelfth and thirteeth chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, that I shall not insist upon it. 'Though I could,' says he, 'speak with the tongues of men and of angels, yet if I have not love, I am but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal,' that make a little pleasant noise that comes to nothing. I would wind up all arguments with this; If we have not love, we have no grace. He that loves him that begets, will love them that are begotten. If we love not the brethren, the love of God doth not dwell in us. It is not our outward order and form, nor our duties, nor any thing we do, or can do, will evidence that we have any thing of the grace of God in us, if we want this grace of love.

III. Having spoken thus far of the nature of evangelical love, and of the reasons of its importance, I would willingly say something to press it upon your hearts and mine own.

The whole issue of this day's work which you have called us unto, under the care and kindness of Christ, depends wholly upon this one instance of our discharging ourselves in this one duty of love. I know not how it comes to pass, but so it is, that professors have of late been wonderfully harassed with sharp invectives, and bitter rebukes for their want of love; and yet I cannot observe there is any fruit of it, or any advantage made by it. And the reason of it seems to be, because all those invectives have been managed upon this principle; If you will do so and so, if you will come up to such and such practices in things of religion, if you will go thus far, and thus far, if you will leave off these and those institutions and ways wherein ye walk; then you have love; if not, you have none at all. And what hath been the fruit hereof? New divisions, new animosities, new rendings and tearings, without the least appearance of any improvement of love whatsoever. I

should be very sorry that any man living should outgo me in desires, that all that fear God throughout the world, especially in these nations, were of one way as well as of one heart. I know I desire it sincerely; but I do verily believe, that when God shall accomplish it, it will be the effect of love, and not the cause of love. It will proceed from love, before it brings forth love. There is not a greater vanity in the world, in my weak apprehensions, than to drive men into such and such a way, and then suppose that love will be the necessary consequence of that way; to think that if by sharp rebukes, by cutting, bitter expressions, they can but drive men into such and such practices, that then love will certainly ensue. We see the contrary all the world over, that those who do most boast and glory in bringing all to uniformity of practice, have least love among them. You may see it in the papal church, they have obtained their end in driving all into a uniformity in practice, and yet the members of it are fighting with, and tearing one another. It is a vain supposition to think to bring men to such a way, whether they will or no, and then to love whether they will or no. I know not truly any way that any who fear God do walk in, though some are nearer the truth than others, which in itself is an obstruction of love. I profess if I did, I would fly from that way, as from a pest-house, or any thing that was mortally destructive; because I know the end of all Christ's institutions is to increase love. Some may be nearer the truth than others, some are so, but if any way doth really in itself obstruct love, without farther consideration, without debating whether it was right or wrong, I would leave that way, for I know it is false. But for persons to reflect upon any institutions of Christ, such as particular churches are, and will be proved to be, as though they were hinderances of love, argues a great unskilfulness in the ways of God, if not ill will towards them. Nay, they are appointed of Christ for this end, that we may first exercise that love which he commands immediately towards one another, that so we may learn to exercise it towards all believers throughout the world. Pray let us not be overtaken with any such apprehension that we cannot exercise love, until we come to such and such a way of agreement,

and so put off the duty till we have no opportunity or ability to exercise it; but let us address ourselves to it in our present state and condition.

I shall close all with two or three cautions against things that may be hinderances in the diligent practice of this great duty I have been speaking of unto you.

1. Let us take heed of a morose, sour, natural disposition. If it doth not hinder many fruits of love, yet it sullies the glory of its exercise extremely. Some good persons have so much of Nabal in them, that blasts the sweet fruit of love which comes from them; it is soured with something of an ill disposition, that hath no life or beauty in it. It is a great mistake to believe that grace only subdues our carnal corruption, and doth not change our natural temper. I believe grace changes the natural temper, and ennobles it; it makes 'the leopard to lie down with the kid,' and 'the bear to eat straw with the ox,' as it is promised; it makes the froward, meek; the passionate, patient; and the morose, benign and kind. And we are to apply grace to these ends and purposes; and not to humour and please ourselves, as though such things are our natural disposition. Grace comes to alter our natural dispositions, that are unsuited to love, and indispose us for it. We are apt to excuse ourselves and one another, and hope that Christ will do so too, because this or that is much from our natural temper. Pray let us not act thus; our natural tempers are to be cured by grace, or it hath not its perfect work upon us.

2. Take heed of such hinderances of love, as may attend your peculiar state and condition. I would speak to them who have the advantage of riches, wealth, honour, reputation in the world, which encompass them with so many circumstances, that they know not how to break through them to that familiarity of love with the meanest member of the church, which is required of them. Brethren, know the gospel leaves all your providential advantages entirely unto you, whatever you have by birth, education, inheritance, estate, titles, places, it leaves the entire enjoyment of them. But in things which purely concern your communion together, the gospel lays all level; there is neither rich nor poor, free nor bond in Christ, but the new creature. Therefore we are so expressly commanded by the apostle James,

chap. ii. that we should have no particular respect in the congregation to persons upon the account of outward advantages. We all serve one common Master, the same Lord; and he is such a Lord, that when he was rich in all the glory of heaven, he became poor for our sakes. And let me beg of you that are rich, to remember this common Lord and Master; and let not your outward advantages therefore keep you at a distance from the meanest, the poorest saint that belongs unto the congregation. If they do, your riches are your temptation, and your place a disadvantage, which you must labour to break through.

Something also might be said to the poorest and lowest sort, who have their temptations too to keep them off from the exercise of love. But I shall waive it.

3. Lastly, Take heed of satisfying yourselves, all of you, with the duties of love, without looking after the entire working of the grace of love. You here that are joined with us this day, have had for a long time so great a light and instructor, that I doubt not but you are acquainted with all the duties of love that are required of you in your especial relations wherein you stand, and that you have been found in the practice of them. I only mind you to take heed, that you be spirited with the grace of love; that which proceeds from faith, and is acted in you by the Holy Ghost; that which gives you delight in, and a dear esteem and valuation of the saints, and creates a cheerfulness and readiness in you for the performance of all these duties.

I thought to have given you many other directions; but I must conclude. If God be pleased to imprint any thing from this word upon our hearts and spirits, we shall have cause to rejoice in it. However remember thus much, that you were begged and entreated, as you regard the glory of God, the honour of the gospel, and the edification of this church (which of two is now become one), concerning which you must all in your places give an account, as well as I in mine; and as you have any respect unto the ministry of him whom God hath set over you, that all is wound up in this one duty of love; which if God please to increase, and make intense among us, I no way doubt but he will prosper this day's work of our union.

SERMON XLIII.*

THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK OF DYING DAILY.

I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord I die daily.—1 Cor. xv. 31.

These words have a great vehemency and emphasis in them, and discover an uncommon earnestness upon the spirit of the apostle when he wrote them: and indeed they carry a greater appearance of such a vehemency in the original, than in our translation. For the words we put in the last place, 'I die daily,' are the first in the original: Καθ' ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω, 'I die daily:' νὴ τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν, ἣν ἔχω ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, 'Yea I do so, by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.' And there is no expression used by the apostle, that hath a greater ardour of spirit in it than this hath.

The special reason of using it in this place, is to evidence the stability of his faith about the resurrection of the dead. That, you know, is the dispute he is upon. And he proves here, that it was not an opinion that he had, but a firm rooted faith that carried him through all difficulties and sufferings. 'Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' I do evidence my faith, saith he, of the resurrection, by my readiness to suffer all things in the confirmation of the truth of it. And it is the great duty of ministers to be ready at all times to evidence the stability of their own faith in the things which they preach to others, by a cheerful suffering for them.

* This sermon was preached Sept. 26, 1680.

There are two things in the words: An assertion; and the confirmation of it. The assertion is this: 'I die daily.' The confirmation of it: 'I protest by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

There are two or three difficulties in these words. I shall very little trouble you with conjectures, but give you what I think the sense of the Holy Ghost in them.

The one is from the ambiguous signification of the word καύχησις, which we render here 'rejoicing.' But in other places it is rendered, sometimes by 'confidence,' sometimes by 'boasting,' and sometimes by 'glorying.' 'Gloriation' is the word I would use, if our language would bear it. 'And your gloriation;' which is an exultation of joy.

There is another difficulty in the transposition of the words, such as are not in the Scripture again. 'I protest by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus.' This hath afforded variety of conjectures unto many. But plainly the sense of it is this; 'By the rejoicing which you and I have in the Lord.' And I could give instances of the like trajections in the Greek tongue, from one person to another, if it were to your edification.

There is yet a third difficulty. The particle νὴ here is a note of an oath, or swearing; as much as ב in the Hebrew tongue or in our language, 'by;' yet sometimes it is used as a note of strong asseveration. And we have chosen to express it by a middle word, 'I protest.' If it be a note of an oath, then the word is used to denote the object; 'I swear by your rejoicing in the Lord; that is, by the Lord in whom you rejoice. As it is said expressly, 'Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac;' that is by him whom his father Isaac feared. But I rather take it here as a note only of vehement asseveration. And so, says he, 'it is as true, as that you and I do glory in Christ, and rejoice in him; I die daily.'

It may have a double sense; I am every day, by reason of preaching the gospel, exposed to dangers and death. For he doth speak both before and after of the dangers he underwent in the work of preaching the gospel; 'I die daily:' or, 'I die daily,' by continually preparing myself to die; I am always in a preparation to die; through the faith of the resurrection I am always prepared to die cheerfully and comfortably, according to the will of God. And this is the sense

I shall fix upon. And it being in a necessary duty, I may raise a general rule from a special instance in this example of the apostle.

Observation. It is the duty of all believers to be preparing themselves every day to die cheerfully, comfortably, and, if it may be, triumphing in the Lord.

Observe only this, that there may be a dying safely, where there is not a dying cheerfully and comfortably. Every believer, whoever he be, shall die safely; but we see many believers do not die cheerfully and comfortably. I do not speak of the first, how all persons may come to die safely; but of the latter, how believers may die comfortably and cheerfully.

And there are two ways of dying cheerfully and comfortably.

1. The one is in outward expressions to the comfort of them that are about us. This depends much on the nature of the distemper whereof men may die, which may oppress the animal spirits, and cloud the mind; and therefore it falls not under rule, but is left to the providence of God.

2. But there is also a dying cheerfully and comfortably in persons own souls, which, it may be in their dying moments they cannot manifest, when they are thoroughly prepared for it.

Truly, brethren, all I can say is, that I am speaking to you of the things which I have considered on my own account, before ever I thought of considering them upon yours; and I cannot declare unto you what I have attained, which may be little or nothing; but only what I have aimed at, if it may be of use to us in this dying time, especially among good ministers, one or another almost every day.

I shall mention three things that in my judgment are requisite unto every believer who would die cheerfully, and come in a fit and full season into the presence of God.

1. The constant exercise of faith, as to the resignation of a departing soul into the hand and sovereign will of God. 'I die daily.' How? Exercising faith constantly in the resignation of a departing soul when the time comes, unto the sovereign grace, good pleasure, power, and faithfulness of God. The soul is now taking its leave of all its concerns in this world; all that it sees, all that it knows by its senses,

all its relations, every thing it hath been acquainted withal, to have an eternal, absolute unconcern in them. It is entering into an invisible world, whereof it knows nothing but what it hath by faith. When Paul was taken up into the third heaven, 2 Cor. xii. 4. we should have been glad to have heard some tidings from the invisible world, how things were there. He saw nothing, only he heard words. Why, blessed Paul, may we not hear those words? No; 'they are not lawful to be uttered,' saith he. God will not have us know any thing in the invisible world, but what is revealed in the word, while we are here. Therefore the souls of them departed, who have died and lived again, as the soul of Lazarus, I doubt not but God supported in their being, but restrained all their operations. For if a separate soul had one natural, intuitive view of God, it would be the greatest misery in the world to send it back into a dying body. God will keep those things to be objects of faith. Lazarus could tell nothing of what was done in heaven; his soul was kept in its being, but all its operations were restrained. I bless God, I have peculiarly exercised my thoughts, according to the conduct of the word, about the invisible world, whereof in due time you may hear something; but in the mean time, I know we have no notion of it, but what is by pure revelation.

Whither now is the soul going? What will be the issue within a few moments? Is it annihilated? Doth death not only separate the body and soul, but destroy our being, so that we shall be no more to eternity? So some would have it, for it is their interest it should be so. Is the soul going into a state of wandering in the air, under the influence of more powerful spirits? Which was the opinion of the old pagan world, as that which caused appearances of the dead so frequently upon the earth.

And this persuasion was taken into purgatory by the Papists; from whence they concluded that there were great appearances of them that were departed continually. And you have a thousand stories of them, which we know to be all the actings and deceits of evil spirits. And such is our darkness as to the invisible world, that the greatest part of Christians have feigned a third state that is not in it, but the fruit of superstition and idolatry. For this is superstition,

to invent things in religion, suited to men's natural affections, or to gratify their lusts for their own profit; both which were designed in this case. For when persons thought the souls of men that were gone into an eternal condition, were lost, and that for ever; no, there is another venture for them, say they; and so they pacified them, that if they were the worst of men, yet there might be hope for them after death. Nor has it a less tendency to gratify men in their lusts, and encourage them to live at their pleasure. And the whole of this they turn to their own profit who invented it. This, by the way, only to manifest the darkness that mankind is in, as to this invisible world. To proceed therefore:

Doth the soul go into a state wherein it is capable of no joy, no consolation? Brethren, let men pretend what they will, he that never received any joy or consolation in this world, but by his senses, or his reason exercised about the object of his senses, doth not know, nor can believe the soul itself should be capable of any consolation in another world. He alone, who hath received immediately into his soul spiritual comfort in this world, can believe that his soul is capable of it in another. But however this is certain, no man can undertake any thing about the conduct of his soul in another world.

What is your way then in this state and condition? What is your wisdom? Truly to resign this departing soul unto the sovereign wisdom, pleasure, faithfulness, and power of God, which is the duty we have in hand by the continual exercise of faith. So the apostle tells us, 2 Tim. i. 12. 'For I know,' saith he, 'whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' It is a mighty thing to keep a separate soul to the day of the resurrection. Why, saith the apostle, 'I know whom I have trusted with it;' I trust it with almighty power. The Lord help us to believe that there shall be an act of almighty power put forth in the behalf of these poor souls of ours, when departed into the invisible world, to keep them to that day, when body and soul shall be united, and come to enjoy God.

We have a glorious example for this duty and exercise of faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ died in the exercise of it. It was the last act of faith Christ put forth in this world: Luke

xxiii. 46. 'When Jesus had cried with a loud voice' (this was the voice of nature, but now he comes to the words of faith) 'he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit' (my departing soul): 'and when he had thus said, he gave up the ghost.' Here was the last exercise of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world, the committing of his departing soul into the hands of God. And to what end did he do it? We are told, Psal. xvi. 8—11. 'I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.' These are the words of David, which our Lord Jesus Christ made use of himself, when he said, 'Into thy hands I commit my spirit.' And the psalmist adds, 'Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth;' Psal. xxxi. 5. An experience of the work of redemption, communicated to us by the truth of the promise, is the greatest encouragement to commend a departing soul into the hands of God.

This to me now (considering the vanishing of all these shadows and appearances, and the eternal dissolution of all relation to things below, and the subsisting of a soul in a separate condition, which we are not acquainted withal) is one of the first things we have to consider, if we will die cheerfully and comfortably; namely, how we can resign a departing soul into the hand and sovereign disposal of God.

It is both a great and eminent act of faith, and is the last victorious act of faith so to do.

1. It is a great and eminent act of faith, Heb. xi. where the mighty efficacy and great success of faith is spoken of. One of the particulars, and that wherein many of the rest did centre, is, 'These all died in faith.' It was a great thing to die in faith under the Old Testament, when they were encompassed with so many shadows, and so much darkness, and when their view into things invisible within the veil, was exceeding much beneath what God hath communicated unto us. Nay, the state of things within the veil was not the same then as now; there was not Christ upon the throne, administering

his office. Notwithstanding faith carried them through all this darkness, and caused them to make a believing venture of their souls upon God, his faithfulness, mercy, and grace.

When it comes to this consideration, it lays all things in the balance; in the one scale, our being, our walking, and life in this world; our sins, and their guilt, our fears, uncertainties, and darkness of a future state, our abhorrence of a dissolution, the consideration of all things that are round about us; in the other, the power, faithfulness, and mercy of God, and his ability to receive, preserve, and keep us to that day, and to be better to us than all these things. Here shall be my portion, saith faith; all things in the other scale are of no value, of no weight to this exceeding weight of power and goodness of God; this is a glorious exercise of faith. Have you tried it, my brethren? Lay things on the one side and the other in the balance, and see which way the scale will draw, what faith will do in such a case.

2. It is the last victorious act of faith, wherein it hath its final conquest over all its adversaries. Faith is the leading grace in all our spiritual warfare and conflict; but all along while we live, it hath faithful company that adheres to it, and helps it. Love works, and hope works, and all other graces, self-denial, readiness to the cross, they all work and help faith. But when we come to die, faith is left alone. Now try what faith will do. The exercise of other graces cease, only faith comes to a close conflict with its last adversary, wherein the whole is to be tried. And by this one act of resigning all into the hand of God, faith triumphs over death, and cries, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' Come give me an inlet into immortality and glory, the everlasting hand of God is ready to receive me. This is the victory whereby we overcome all our spiritual enemies.

I thought to have made some use of what hath been said; to examine whether we do live in the exercise of this grace, or no, and what benefit we have thereby. And I should have touched especially upon this one thing, this alone will keep us from all surprisal of death. Not to be surprised with any thing is the substance of human wisdom; not to be surprised with death is a great part of the substance of our spiritual wisdom.

SERMON XLIV.*

I MADE an entrance upon this portion of Scripture the last Lord's day. And I judged the subject very suitable, because of the warnings God hath variously given us to be exercising ourselves unto this duty. God hath since increased the seasonableness, by taking away a great and eminent servant of his from among us; concerning whom, I will say this one word, and no more.

As far as I know by thirty years acquaintance and friendship, and half that time in church-fellowship, it may be the age wherein he lived did not produce many more wise, more holy, more useful than he in his station, if any. And so I leave him at rest with God.

I proposed to insist upon those things which are necessary for us, to obtain a peaceable and comfortable departure out of this world. And I have spoken to one head, which was the daily exercise of faith in the resignation of a departing soul to the sovereign power and will of God, to be treated and entertained by him according to the tenour of the covenant of grace.

I will not leave this point till I have made some use of it. And I shall take no other measure of my time, but the strength God is pleased to give me.

Use 1. It may be worth our while to inquire into the especial nature of this duty which we are exhorted unto; for we may every day more and more understand the weakness of many, who think, it may be, they know something of it, when they know not what it means. We may therefore consider three things in it. (1.) What is the special and immediate object of this exercise of faith. (2.) What is the form or special nature of it. And, (3.) What is the way and manner of its performance.

(1.) As to the especial and immediate object of this exercise of faith, and which must take with it a special motive, that, I say, is God, under the consideration of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness; and this upon the motive of some

* This sermon was preached Oct. 3, 1680.

experience of his kindness and grace. So speaks the psalmist, Psal. xxxi. 5. 'Into thy hand I commit my spirit.' What was it that gave him confidence so to do? 'Thou hast redeemed me,' saith he, 'O Lord God of truth.' A sense of redeeming grace, conveyed by the truth of the promises, is required in all that would commit their spirits into the hand of God. And therefore, brethren, when you come to the exercise of this great duty, you must lay this foundation, in some sense and experience of the grace and kindness of God, or you can never perform it in a due manner. And,

[1.] Upon this motive, the first thing we consider in God, in the resignation of our souls to him, is his sovereignty. It is mentioned in two places in the Psalms, in both which this duty is proposed unto us: Psal. xvi. 1, 2. 'Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord' (thou hast said unto Jehovah), 'Thou art my Lord.' He doth not use the word יהוה again, but אדני, 'Thou art my Lord,' אדני אתה who hast the sovereign disposal of me; I am going to give up my spirit to thee, and I do it upon the consideration of thy sovereignty, that 'thou art my Lord.' So Psal. xxxi. 14, 15. 'I trusted in thee, O Lord.' Why so? 'I said, thou art my God, my times are in thy hand.' It is because of thy sovereignty; 'Thou art my God,' who has the sovereign disposal of me, therefore I commit myself to thee. It follows those words, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.' Faith regards the glorious sovereignty of God, as the absolute free disposer of all things here, and unto eternity, without any reserve but his own pleasure, when it makes this resignation of the soul unto him.

[2.] It hath a peculiar respect unto the power of God: 2 Tim. i. 12. 'I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.' It is common for persons to go through it in a customary manner, die they must; but there is nothing can encourage them to yield up their souls to God, but an apprehension of such an infinite power that is able to preserve them in eternal being in the invisible world; especially to the day of the resurrection.

[3.] It respects the faithfulness of God, as one who hath promised that he will take care of us when we are gone out

of this world. 1 Pet. iv. 19. 'Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator;' that is, as a God who is omnipotent, who made all things, and is faithful in the accomplishing of his promises.

So then this duty I exhort unto, is an immediate address unto God, an exercise of faith upon him, with special respect unto his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, upon an experience we have in some measure, of his goodness and grace.

The seat before my eyes is very much changed in a short time, and I know not, brethren, how soon it may be the lot of any of you to stand in need of understanding this thing, and bringing it into practice. You may, if you please, remember it, for it is of great importance to have immediate converse with God, with respect unto those great and awful attributes of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. That is the first thing.

(2.) As to the special form of this duty, there are two words wherein it is expressed, and both of the same import; for in one place it is rendered, 'commending,' in another, 'committing,' Psal. xxxi. 5. and Luke xxiii. 46. But it is a re-commending or committing, as men commit a trust. If a man lay a dying, and had an only child, and an estate to leave him; with what solemnity would he commit him to the trust of his friend, to take care of him? I commit this poor child, who is helpless and fatherless, I commit him to your trust, saith he, to your love, care, and power to look after him. He doth it with great solemnity. The psalmist calls his soul, 'his darling,' and 'only one:' 'Deliver my darling from the dog,' and 'my only one.' And now when a person is about to leave this world, he is to commit his soul, and leave it in trust somewhere. Then this exercise of faith, is a leaving in trust, or committing our 'darling,' our 'only one,' that is departing out of this tabernacle, unto God, under the consideration of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. I do not yet speak unto the life of this duty, which consists in committing the trust of our souls unto God, to be dealt withal, not according to our choice, but according to the terms of the covenant of grace, let it fall where it will, to all eternity; that is the solemn committing.

(3.) As to the manner of it, it ought to be done expressly

in words that we should say to God. I do not give instructions to them who are dying, but to them that live, that they may be prepared to die. We should say to God, Lord, I have been thus long in this world, I have seen much variety in the outward dispensation of things in the world, but a thousand times more in the inward frame of my spirit, and I am now leaving the world upon thy call; I am to be here no more: O Lord, after all, being to enter into a new, eternal state, I commit my soul unto thee, I leave it with thee, I put all my trust and confidence in thy faithfulness, power, and sovereignty, to be dealt withal according to the terms of the covenant of grace; now I can lie down in peace.

Use 2. What benefit shall we receive hereby, if we do thus exercise our souls? I answer, We shall receive these advantages:

(1.) I know nothing that is more meet to keep our souls in a constant reverence of God, which is the very life and soul of holiness and obedience. And the best profession where this is not, is of no value. Now nothing is more suited to this, than an immediate access unto God every day, frequently at least, under the consideration of his glorious sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, as if you were immediately going into his presence, and into his hands. The more you abound in it, the greater will your reverence of God be. We have deceitful hearts, and a very crafty adversary to deal withal. We are commanded to draw nigh, and to have our access unto God with boldness, Heb. x. 'To come boldly to the throne of grace;' Heb. iv. 16. And we should do it frequently. Now nothing in this world is so suited to take off reverence, as boldness and frequency. Where men make bold, and where they frequent, as in a multitude of duties many are bold and frequent, it works off the reverence of God. That is carnal boldness. But the more frequently you make your accesses unto God with spiritual boldness, the more will your hearts be filled with a reverence of God continually. And the more frequently you make your approaches unto God in outward duties without this holy and humble reverence, whatever your gifts be, reverence of God will decay. What poor, slight, withering things have I seen some men grow to be, under a fair outward conversation, and multiplication of duties! And you

may take this measure with you in all your duties; If they increase a reverence of God, they are from grace; if they do not, they are from gifts, and no way sanctify the soul wherein they are.

(2.) It will support us under all our sufferings. The soul that is accustomed to this exercise of faith, will not be greatly moved in any of its sufferings. The Lord knows we are all moved and shaken, and ready to be so sometimes very unhandsomely and unduly, as the leaves of the forest; but it will keep us from being greatly moved. 'I shall not be greatly moved,' saith the psalmist. And elsewhere it is enjoined, 'Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator.' This will support you under all your sufferings. It is the very case and state in Psal. xxxi. from whence I have taken my principal testimony. 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed,' &c. 'for I have heard the slander of many, fear was on every side, while they took counsel together against me; they devised to take away my life.' What course doth he then take in all these distresses, sufferings, and persecutions? Why, saith he, 'I said, Thou art my God, my times are in thy hands.' He makes a resignation of himself to the sovereignty of God, and so was at peace.

I have shewed you now, how you may exercise this duty; and I do reckon myself to be near my account, and speak as one that is sensible of it; would I could prevail with you to bring it more or less into actual exercise, before you give rest to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids.

Use 3. In the next place, Who are they that do or can perform this duty as they ought, to live in this exercise of faith?

I am certain that they do not do so, who live as if they were to live here for ever. But this is an evident proof of that distemper and confusion which is come upon the mind and soul of man. Truly if a man of sobriety and reputation did come to such kind of men, who live in their sensuality and wickedness, as the world is full of them, and tell them,

Sirs! what do you do? I am persuaded that there is a death to come, and an eternal state of blessedness, or woe, near approaching; the way wherein you are will certainly ingulf you in eternal destruction:—They would say to him, This is your opinion. Yet one would think a wise man should prevail with them, to do something according to his opinion. But it is not so. They have convictions in their minds, they must die; they will not only say, It is mine, or your opinion, but they themselves are convinced of a future state, and profess it. But will they do any thing from an influence of this conviction? Nothing at all, no more than if they were brute beasts. These are not able to come to the exercise of their duty.

Nor those who walk at all peradventure. They know they must die; but they are apt to think they have other things to do before they die; and it will be time enough hereafter, at one season or another, to be preparing to die. The apostle did 'die daily' indeed; but they have something else to do. When death knocks at their neighbour's door, and they hear such a one is dead; and it comes to their own families, and takes away this or that person; then they have some thoughts for a little while, but they quickly wear off, and they return to their common frame of spirit again. 'Yet a little more slumber, a little more sleep, a little more folding of the arms to sleep,' a little more secure converse in the world, attending unto our affairs; but death will come as an armed man, and they shall not be able to escape.

There are therefore two things required of every one that would be found in the exercise of this duty.

(1.) That he lay the foundation of it in some comfortable persuasion of an interest in Christ, which alone will enable him to die safely; and having obtained that, he may labour after that which will enable him to die comfortably and cheerfully. Some men die safely, but upon many considerations, not now to be mentioned, they do not appear to die comfortably. And some men die very comfortably to all outward appearance, that do not die safely. This therefore is necessary, that there be this foundation laid, some comfortable persuasion of our interest in Christ, that we may die safely, or else it is to no purpose to expect to die comfortably.

(2.) Many think at last, a few words will do it, and there is an end; but let me assure you, not only upon principles of Scripture truth, but of nature, there is no man can do it, that hath not a view into the glory of spiritual and eternal things, outbalancing all his soul parts withal in this world. I hear men willing to die, and I find others do, but it is to go contrary to the principles of nature. No man under heaven (it implies a contradiction) can part with that which appears good to him, unless it be upon motives of a greater good; he must part with it, but he cannot willingly and cheerfully part with it. If you would be thus able willingly and cheerfully to resign a departing soul unto God, labour to have a view of those better things which are infinitely more great and glorious, which your souls shall come to the enjoyment of upon this departure.

The calls of God are great upon us, both public and private, and special to this congregation; God expects a special compliance with his calls from us, or else we shall yet be exercised with farther tokens of his displeasure.

SERMON XLV.*

That which I have been treating upon from these words, is to declare the ways and duties whereby a believer may come to die, not only safely, which all believers shall; but also cheerfully and comfortably, so as to have a free and abundant entrance into the kingdom of God in glory.

I have spoken but to one thing, which is the exercise of faith in the resignation of a departing soul, entering into the invisible world, into the sovereign hand and pleasure of God, to be disposed of according to the tenour of the everlasting covenant.

There are two things yet remaining, necessary to the same end, at least I find them so; which (if God will) I shall dispatch at this time.

II. There is required unto this great end, a readiness and willingness to part with this body which we carry about us, and to lay it down in the dust. The soul's natural aversation to let go this body, is that which we call an unwillingness to die; that hath made some say, like him of old, 'mori nolo,' &c. 'I can be content to be dead, but I would not die.'

There are two reasons why the soul hath a natural unwillingness to part with the body.

1. Because it is, and hath been ever since it had a being, the only instrument of all the operations and actings of its faculties and powers. The whole privilege of a being consists in its powers and acts. Now from the first moment of its being, the soul hath had no instrument to act by, but the body, and that not only in the outward actions that the body performs, but in all its internal, rational actings, it cannot act without the instrumentality of the body. Therefore we know a hurt in the body, as oftentimes in the head, hath utterly deprived the soul of the exercise of all its powers and faculties during life. It cannot act rational, internal actings but by the body; and how it can act without the body, it knows not. This hath ingrafted a natural unwillingness in the soul to let go the body, whereby from the first

* This sermon was preached October 10, 1680.

instant of its being, it hath constantly acted. That is but one reason of it, there is yet a greater.

2. The other reason is, that strict, near, unparalleled union, and relation between the soul and the body. There is a near union between parents and children, a nearer between husband and wife; but they are nothing to this union between the soul and body. There is an ineffable, inconceivable union between the two natures, the divine and the human, in the person of the Son of God; but this union was eternally indissoluble from the first moment of it, when the body and soul of Christ were separated, yet they continued in their union with the person of the Son of God, as much as before, or as now in heaven. But here is a union that is dissoluble between a heavenly spirit, and an earthly, sensual body, that is, two essential parts of the same nature. Pray give me leave to speak a little to it. I have considered what it is to die, and examined whence ariseth the difficulty. Now, I say, it ariseth from this peculiar constitution of our nature, there being no such thing in all the works of God, in heaven above, or in the earth beneath. The angels are pure, immaterial spirits, they have nothing in them that can die. God can annihilate an angel; he that made all things out of nothing, can bring all things into nothing; but an angel cannot die from the principles of his own constitution; there is nothing in him that can die. A brute creature hath nothing in it that can live, when death comes. The spirit of a beast Solomon speaks of, as that which 'goeth downward.' It is not the object of Almighty power to preserve it, because it is nothing but the act of the body in its temperature and constitution. But now man is 'medium participationis,' he hath an angelical nature from above that cannot die, and a nature from beneath that cannot always live, since the entrance of sin, though it might have done so before. And therefore in the product of man, there was a double act of creation, and but a single act in any other creatures. The creation of angels is not mentioned, unless in that, 'Let there be light, and there was light;' but in all other things there was but one single act for its production. But when God came to make man, there were two distinct acts of creation. 'God made man of the dust of the earth.' And what then? 'And breathed into him the spirit of life.'

Here is something that is not in all God's creation beside. And now upon this dissolution, all the actings of this nature, as it was one person, must cease unto the day of the resurrection. A wonderful change it is, that there shall be no more acting of the entire nature of man, until the resurrection; only one part of this nature continues to act itself according to its own powers. And one end of God's work upon us in the grave, is to free our bodies from all alliance, and relation, and likeness unto the bodies of beasts. So our Saviour tells us, Luke xx. Do not mistake, saith he, 'You shall neither marry, nor give in marriage,' nor have any one action common to brutes, but the whole man shall be, ὡς ἄγγελοι, 'like unto the angels.' This is the great privilege of our nature, as the wise man declares, Eccles. iii. 19. where he answers the objection of an epicure: 'That which befalls the sons of men, befalls beasts, even one thing befalls them; as one dies, so dies the other; they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; all go unto their own place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.' As far as I can see it is so, saith the man. But what saith the wise man? 'Who knoweth the spirit of a man that goeth upward, and the spirit of a beast that goeth downward to the earth?' Alas! you are mistaken, the difference doth not lie in this outward nature wherein man and beast have a near alliance one to another; but in the spiritual, heavenly nature, that is from above; and unless you know that, you will think all are as beasts indeed. This then is the foundation of the unalterable aversation in the mind and soul to part with the body, this strange constitution of our nature, which has nothing like it in the whole work of God, nothing to give us any representation of it, but it is peculiar unto us. And then this dissolution is but once to be made. They observe of the old heroes, who would freely venture their lives, and cast them away in any great attempt, that when they came to die, when they had killed themselves, or were killed by others, their souls went away with groaning and indignation: they knew not how to bear the dissolution of the union.

And therefore this is in us all, brethren, it is our first desire, which we have upon a prospect that we cannot con-

tinue here, 'to be clothed upon,' and, as the apostle says, 'that mortality may be swallowed up of life;' that the body and soul together may go into immortality and glory. But this is not God's way; this is that he will bring us to, that we be ready and willing to part with these bodies of ours, notwithstanding this union, or we cannot die cheerfully and comfortably.

Upon what grounds, then, can a man be ready and willing to lay down his tabernacle in the dust?

I shall fix upon two reasons, both given us by the same apostle.

(1.) The first is that which he gives us, Phil. i. 23. 'Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ.' Ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχω, 'I have a strong bent and inclination of spirit.' The word is that which in Scripture is used for 'lust' and 'concupiscence,' that is always working with strong bent and inclination. It is not a desire that sometimes befalls me, now and then, when in trouble, sickness, or pain; but I have an habitual, constant inclination. Unto what? Ἀναλῦσαι, 'to depart,' to leave this body. It is usually translated in the passive; I have a desire 'to be dissolved.' But the plain meaning of the word is this; 'I do desire that the contexture of my nature may be reduced unto its distinct principles, may be analyzed.' Now analysis is the reducing of a speech from the present contexture into its proper distinct principles. Then here lies the difficulty. I told you the soul hath an aversation to this dissolution; and yet the apostle saith, I have a continual, strong inclination to it. To what? Pray observe it: 'To be with Christ.' I have no inclination to be dissolved as the end, but only as the means for another end, that without it I cannot be with Christ. There is my end. And so far with respect unto that end, that which is in itself no object of inclination, becomes an object of desire. Brethren, I know no man dies willingly; no man living can have an habitual inclination to close cheerfully with this dissolution; but by looking upon it as a means to come to the enjoyment of Christ. I tell you, your bodies are better to you than all the world, than all your goods, or any thing else; but Christ is better to the soul than any thing: and therefore unless it be for the enjoyment of Christ, let men

pretend what they will, there is no man willing to part with the body, to be dissolved. Grow in that desire of coming to Christ, and you will conquer the unwillingness of death.

(2.) The second reason is given us, Rom. viii. 10. 'The body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness.' The body is not only doomed to death by reason of original sin, as death entered upon all on that account; but the body must be brought to death, that sin may be rooted out of it. Sin hath taken such a close, inseparable habitation in the body, that nothing but the death of the body can make a separation. The body must be dead because of sin. Saith the sincere soul, God knows that I have a thousand times attempted a thorough and absolute mortification of every sin, and God hath helped me to endeavour that it should abide no more in me. I have sometimes thought myself near an attainment, but I have found a disappointment, and I am perfectly satisfied in it, that as long as I have this body I shall never be without sin; it must be dead by reason of sin, or the fibres and roots of it will never be plucked up, the nature of it can never be extinguished, it can never be separated utterly from it. Here lies the great mystery of the grave under the covenant of grace, and by virtue of the death of Christ. What is it? Worms and corruption? No; it is God's fining-pot, his way to purify, and there is no other way to make an eternal separation between sin and the body, but by consuming of it in the grave. A secret virtue shall issue out from the death of Christ unto the body of a believer laid in the grave, that shall eternally purify it at its resurrection from every thing of sin. I will not say what apprehensions some have had concerning the state of souls upon the consumption of the body in the grave, because I will speak nothing unto you that is questionable.

This then is the second reason, That all other attempts to eradicate sin have failed, and not had their issue; they have brought me to be ashamed of myself in the frowardness, darkness, and unbelief of my nature; I will therefore be willing to part with my body. Such a one then will say, This is that which God calls me unto. Go then thou poor, mortal, sinful flesh, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' I give thee up unto the doom of the Holy One,

whose mouth hath spoken it, that thou must return to the dust, and there he will refine thee, and purify thee, that notwithstanding this departure, 'my glory shall rejoice,' and thou 'my flesh shall rest in hope,' for the time will come, when he 'will have a desire to the work of his hands;' and 'will call, and thou shalt answer' him out of the dust, as Job xiv. 15. Be not afraid to enter into darkness, as there is no sting in death, so there is no darkness in the grave whither thou art going. It is but lying so long in the hands of the great refiner, who will purge, purify, and restore thee. Therefore lie down in the dust in peace.

This is the second thing that is required in men that would die with their eyes open, that would die cheerfully and comfortably, according to the will of God; to be willing to leave the body to God's disposal to be laid up in the dust, because thereby it shall come to see Christ, and likewise shall have an end of sin.

I shall name but one thing more, and that very briefly; but it is the great thing that I would give in charge to my own soul: I pray God help me so to do. And it is this:

III. Let us take heed of being surprised with death.

This is that peculiar wisdom which God calls us all unto at this day. We know not how soon we may be called upon by death. It may not come in an ordinary course, by long sickness, and give us warning; nor when we have lived to the age of a man, which is 'threescore years and ten,' as the psalmist speaks; but we may be surprised with it, when we look not for it. He that hath not learned it for himself from the dealings of God at this present in the world, and in this congregation, will not believe it if one should come from the dead and tell him so. Let this then be fixed upon our minds, that whatsoever be our state and condition, some are strong, young, and healthy, and some of us are old and feeble going out of the world; but there are none of us but may be surprised with it. Take heed therefore that you be not surprised in an ill frame. I hope there are none of you, but do understand that there is great variety in the frames of believers, sometimes they are in a good frame, grace is active and quick, they are ready to take impressions by the word, and warnings, delighting in holy thoughts; and sometimes again, it may be the world, temptations, or self-love comes

in, or overvaluation of our relations, and indisposes them again, and they are very unfit and lifeless for the performance of duties with delight and vigour of spirit; and these they lose, though they keep up to all their duties. I persuade myself you will confirm this with your own experience. There is no maintaining (though there may be impressions) of a quick, holy, lively frame, but by a sedulous contemplation, and constant view of things that are above. Many will tell you, that when God hath been pleased to keep up their minds unto the thoughts of things above, and draw out their affections to cleave unto them, all things have gone well with them, every prayer had life in it, and every sermon and duty, pleasure and joy, and their hearts have lain down and arose in peace. But when they have lost their view of spiritual things, all other things continue, but there is a kind of deadness upon them. Why then our wisdom in this case is to labour to keep up this spiritual view of eternal things, in a holy contemplation of, and cleaving to them in our affections, or death will be surprising; come when it will, you will be surprised by it. But if this be our frame, what comes this messenger for? Death is a messenger sent of God; he knocks at the door, and what comes he for? To perfect the frame you are in, that you may see heavenly things more clearly. He is come to free you from that deadness you are burdened withal, that darkness you are entangled with, and to set you at perfect liberty in the enjoyment of those things your souls cleave unto. How then can your souls but bid this messenger welcome? Pray then that God would keep up your souls by fresh supplies of his Spirit, unto a constant view of heavenly things. And you must do it by prayer, that God would give you fresh oil, to increase light in your minds and understandings. Some can tell you by experience, that having made it their business with all their strength and study to live in that frame, they have found their own light decay, so that it would not be so fixed and constant towards heavenly things, nor so affect the heart as it had done before. Their light would work no more, until fresh supplies from the Holy Ghost gave quickness to it, and fresh oil to increase, to discern the beauty of spiritual and heavenly things. In plain terms, I speak to dying men, that know not how soon they may die. God advise my own heart of this thing, that I

should labour and watch that death might not find me out of the view of spiritual things. If it do, if our bellies cleave unto the dust, and our eyes are turned to the ground; if we are filled with other things, and death approaches, do you think it will be an easy thing to gather in your minds and affections to a compliance with it? You will not find it so. When David was in a good frame, he could say, 'Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth: O Lord, into thine hands I commit my spirit.' I am willing to come and lay down my tabernacle, and embrace this messenger. But David falls from his good frame, under some decays of spirit, Psal. xxxix. and there makes great complaint of it. Where is the readiness now of the good man, and where is his willingness of giving up his spirit into the hand of God? 'Spare me a little that I may recover my strength,' ver. 13. Not his outward strength, but a better frame, fit to die in. And if death overtake us in such a frame, the best of us will be found to cry so: 'O, spare me a little to recover my strength.' O, the entanglements that have been brought upon me by this and that temptation, and diversion; by this coldness and decay! O Lord, spare me a little. There is mercy with God for persons in this frame; but if it were the will of God, I had rather it should be, 'Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit; for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.'

SEVERAL PRACTICAL

CASES OF CONSCIENCE RESOLVED;

DELIVERED

IN SOME SHORT DISCOURSES

AT

CHURCH-MEETINGS.

DISCOURSE I.*

Question. WHAT conviction of a state of sin, and of the guilt of sin, is necessary to cause a soul sincerely to look after Christ?

Answer. There is one thing only that I shall at present speak to, and that is this: What is the lowest condition that hath the nature of conviction in sincerity, so as that souls may not be discouraged from closing with Christ, because they have had no greater convictions of sin? And I shall speak to it on this account; because, although the things that have already been spoken by others are true, and such as those who have spoken them have found to be true by the word, and their own experience; yet, it may be, others have not come up in their experience unto such a distinct observation of the work of conviction, as hath been laid down; that they may be discouraged. For seeing conviction is so indispensably necessary, some may say, it hath not been thus and thus with me, according as hath been declared. Therefore I would only shew what I judge to be so necessary, as that without it a soul cannot be supposed sincerely to have closed with Christ. And we having all made our profession of choosing and closing with Christ, as I would be loath to say any thing that might discourage any, lest they should have failed in the very necessary work of conviction; so I would not betray the truth of God, nor the souls of any.

Therefore I shall place it upon this: What Jesus Christ doth indispensably call men unto, in order to believing in him, that is indispensably required of them. And this I shall manifest out of two or three places of Scripture: Mark ii. 17. 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' Now this calling them unto repentance, is a calling them unto it by the faith which is in him. The apostle saith, 1 Tim i. 15. 'It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' What kind of sinners doth Christ

* Delivered January 28, 1672.

call? Whom he calls to repentance, he calls to faith; and whom he calls to faith, that they may truly believe; they are sinners, opposed unto them that are righteous: 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' The 'righteous:' Who are those righteous? The Scriptures tell us of these very men, that there were two sorts of them: First, Such as trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised other men. As long as a man trusteth in himself that he is righteous, Christ doth not call that man to believe. So long as a man is persuaded that his condition is good enough, he shall do well enough, that man hath no warrant to believe. Another description of these very persons, though upon another occasion, is given by the apostle Paul, Rom. x. 3. where he says, they were 'ignorant of the righteousness of God, and went about to establish their own righteousness.' Though they did not come to trust in themselves for righteousness; yet sought righteousness as it were by the works of the law, and went about to establish their own righteousness. Jesus Christ doth not call these men to believe: these righteous persons have no ground for believing. What is the conclusion? Lost sinners, saith Christ, this is that I require of you. So that this is what I assert to be indispensably necessary; namely, That they are so far convinced that they are sinners as to state and course, that they are not righteous in themselves, and can have no righteousness in themselves. I say, therefore, when a person is not really convinced that he is not righteous, he is not under the call of Jesus Christ: and if he doth believe this, he is under a sovereign dispensation, and let not such despond.

Another direction of Christ is, 'The whole need not the physician, but they that are sick;' Matt. ix. 12. There are in my apprehension two things in a sick person that have need of a physician: First, He hath an uneasiness. A man who is sick, though he would shift it, yet his uneasiness will cause him to send for a physician. Saith Christ, I come to such persons who say they can find no rest nor ease in their present condition. It may be, they have often tried this and that, and see all will not do, they are sick still; conscience reflects, and their hearts are burdened, and they must have relief, or they shall not be free. Secondly, There

is a fear that it will end in death. This puts the sick person upon sending for a physician. When the soul is made uneasy in its state and condition, can find no rest nor ease, it thinks, if I abide here, I shall be lost for ever. This soul doth Christ call; this man will be at the charge of a physician, cost what it will.

There is another word of Christ, very remarkably speaks just to the same purpose, Matt. xi. 28. 'Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' A soul finding itself under want, labouring after something, whereby it may be accepted with God. I will not confine this to extraordinary instances, for sometimes he is found of them that sought him not; but the ordinary case of a labouring soul, before closing with Christ, is to abstain from sin, pray more or less, be found in duties, and under strong desires to be accepted with God. And what is the end of these labours and endeavours? They labour and are weary; that is, they see their labour comes to no effect; they do not find rest, and peace, and acceptance with God. And here is the turning point; Isa. lvii. 10. 'Thou art wearied in the largeness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope.' When the soul hath laboured for acceptance with God, and comes to be weary, saith Christ, 'Come unto me.' No, saith the light of nature, come unto me, trust unto your own endeavours. Saith the soul, I will try what it will do; I will not say, 'There is no hope.' Saith another, I will not say so, I will go unto Christ: this is he whom Christ calls.

Now these things I do account indispensably necessary, antecedently to believing, as to the substance of them. And this, I hope, hath been found in all our souls. And if we have obtained so far, we need not then question whether our close with Christ be sincere or not. This is all that I dare assert to be absolutely and indispensably necessary: many pretend to believe though they never were convinced thoroughly that they were not righteous; never were sick in their lives, never had fears that they should die. These are contrary to the express rule Christ hath given, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners;' not those that say, 'There is hope;' but those that say, 'There is no hope.'

DISCOURSE II.*

Question. SEEING the act of closing with Christ is secret and hidden, and the special times and seasons of our conversion unto God are unknown unto most: what are the most certain evidences and pledges, that we have cordially and sincerely received Christ, and returned unto God?

Answer. I do acknowledge the inquiry is very large, and such as we may be straitened in, through the abundance of it. I shall only speak plainly some few things that to me are an evidence of a sincere closing with Christ, and receiving of Christ, such as I know have been of use unto some.

First, When there is a permanency and abiding in the choice we have made of Christ, notwithstanding opposition against it, that we shall be sure to meet withal. I do not speak to the nature of the choice, or the means of it, how the mind is prepared for it; but I speak unto the poorest, the weakest of the flock, that may be inquiring, whether they have made a sincere choice of Christ or not; I say, they may try it by the permanency and abiding in their choice against opposition.

And there are two sorts of oppositions that will try us and shake us; as to our choice, as I have found it, if I have had any experience of these things.

1. Opposition from charges of the guilt of sin, and the law.

2. Opposition from temptations unto sin.

1. There will, even after sincere believing and closing with Christ, be many a heavy charge brought against a soul from the law, and the guilt of sin in the conscience. Now in such a case the inquiry is, What the soul abides by, when it is shaken? Why truly, if a man go only upon mere convictions, on such shaking impressions of the guilt of sin, he will be very ready, and inclined in his own mind, to tack about to some other relief. He puts out fair for his voyage, the storm arises, the ship will not carry him, he must tack

* Delivered February 7, 167?.

about for another harbour. I have known it so with some, and experienced when the wind hath sat very strong that way with myself: when the guilt of sin hath been charged with all its circumstances, the soul hath been very hardly able to keep its hold, yet notwithstanding resolved, I will trust to Christ; but it hath been tacking about to self again, I must remedy this, have relief for this from myself, I cannot abide by it, and live wholly upon Christ, and when the storm is over, then I will out to sea again. I say this is no good sign to me, when things are so: but when a soul in all those charges, that sometimes come upon it, abides the issue, here I will trust upon Christ, let the worst come upon me; this I call a permanency in our choice against opposition. I hope you have experience of it.

2. There must be a permanency in our choice of Christ against temptations unto sin, as well as against the charges from sin. Truly the former, of abiding with Christ against the charges from sin, is our daily work. It is sometimes more high and pressing, but it is our daily work. But there are also temptations unto sin, it may be to the neglect of our duty, or to a compliance in any evil way (which we are subject unto while in the body), and perhaps great sins. Here Joseph's reply applied to Christ, is that which doth argue our choice of Christ to be sincere. 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' When the soul can draw a prevailing argument from that: How shall I do this, and relinquish my Lord Christ? I will not do this against him, whom I have chosen. This is a good argument, if frequently reiterated, that our choice of Christ is sincere.

Secondly, Growing up in a love unto the person of Christ is a great evidence to me of a sincere choice of Christ. It is a blessed field that is before me, but I shall but hint things unto you. When the soul hath received Christ, it cannot but study Christ: and though it is no argument against the sincerity of a man's faith and grace, that he doth principally regard the offices, and graces of Christ, and the benefits we have by him, yet it is an argument against the thrift and growth of it. For a thriving faith and grace will come to respect principally the person of Christ. I mean this: when the soul studies the person of Christ,

the glory of God in him, of his natures, the union of them in one person, of his love, condescension, and grace; and the heart is drawn out to love him, and cry, 'Doubtless I count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of Christ Jesus my Lord: What is thy beloved more than another beloved? My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousands; he is altogether lovely:' to see an excellency, a desirableness in the person of Christ, so as to grow in admiration and love of him, is to me an evidence, that when all fails besides, will greatly support the soul and persuade it, that its choice is true. Nay, it is one of the most spiritual evidences; for I much question, whether an unregenerate man can love Christ for his own sake at all. But it is a good sign of growth, when our love to the person of Christ grows, when we meditate much upon it, and think much about it. I could shew you wherein the beauty of Christ's person doth much consist, but I have not time now to do it.

Thirdly, Another evidence to me of the soul's having made a sincere choice of Christ is, when it continues to approve, judge well of, and every day more and more to see the glory, the excellency, the holiness, the grace which is in the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, approves of it as not only a necessary way, a way it has betaken itself to, because it must unavoidably perish in any other way; but when it approves of it to be a most excellent way, in pardoning sin freely through the atonement he hath made, and the imputation of his righteousness unto us; while the righteousness, the holiness, and the grace of God in all this is glorified. Saith the soul, What a blind, wretched creature was I, that I did not see an excellency in this way before! It is better than the way of the law, and the old covenant; I approve of this way with all my heart; if all other ways were set before me, and made possible, I would choose this way of going to God by Jesus Christ, as the best way, that brings most glory to God, and most satisfaction unto the creature, and is most suited to the desires of my heart; I would have no other way. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' says Christ; and this I will abide by, whatsoever becomes of me, replies the soul; though I should perish, I will abide by it, since God hath given me such a discovery

of the glory of saving sinners by Christ, that is inferior to nothing but the glory of heaven. I see that glory to God in it, that exaltation to Christ, whom I would love, that honour to the Holy Spirit, and safety to my own soul, that I will abide by it. A growing in the approbation of this way gives some assurance that we have made a true and sincere choice of Christ.

Give me leave to add this one thing more:

Fourthly, That a delight in obedience unto God by Christ, in the ways of his own appointment, is a great evidence that we have chosen Christ and he us; chosen him as our king, prophet, and priest. The ways of the worship of God in his church and ordinance are the ways and worship of God in Christ, which he hath appointed: take these things abstractedly and in themselves, and we should be apt to say of them, as was said of Christ, 'There is no beauty in them, nor glory, that they should be desired.' There is much more outward beauty and glory in other ways that Christ hath not appointed. But if we love the ways Christ hath appointed, because he hath appointed them, then we choose those ways because we have chosen him to be our king; and that is it which gives them beauty and life. And when the ways of Christ's appointment grow heavy and burdensome to us, we are weary of them, and are willing to have our neck from under the yoke; it is a sign we grow weary of him, who is the author of them; and this is a great sign that we never made a right and sincere choice of him.

Many other things might be offered as evidences of sincere closing with Christ; but these are some which have been of use to me, and I hope they may be so unto some of you.

DISCOURSE III.

Question. WHAT concern have we in the sins of the day wherein we live?

Answer. All sins may be referred to two heads.

First, Irreligion.

Secondly, Immorality.

First, Irreligion. And that may be reduced to two heads: Atheism, and false worship: you may add also particularly, the contempt of all instituted worship. It takes up much of the sins against the first table; however at present I shall only speak of the first of them.

As to atheism, then, it may be no age can parallel that wherein we live, consider all the ways whereby the atheism of man's heart may discover itself. For take it absolutely and in the seat of it, it is found only in the heart of man; unless some one or other prodigious instance breaks out sometime, as we have had in our days; but otherwise, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.' The heart is the seat of atheism.

But we consider the ways whereby this atheism may and doth manifest itself.

(1.) By horrid, cursed, blasphemous swearing, which is a contempt of the name of God. And when did it ever more abound in this nation?

(2.) By reproaching of the Spirit of God. Perhaps this is the peculiar sin of the nation at this day, and that the like hath not been known, or heard of, in any nation under the sun.

(3.) By scoffing at all holy things, at the Scriptures, at every thing that carries a reverence and fear of God; so that a man who dare profess a fear of God in what he doth, makes himself a scorn.

(4.) Contempt of all God's providential warnings, is another proof of atheism. Never had a nation more warnings from God's providence, nor ever were they more despised. These things, brethren, are not done in a corner, they are perpetrated in the face of the sun. The steam of them darkens the whole heaven, and they abound more and more every day.

Secondly, Shall we go to the other head, viz. Immorality, and see how it is there? It would be an endless thing to go over the sins that reign among us; oppression, blood, uncleanness, sensuality, drunkenness, all to the height raging and reigning in the nation. I mention these things as a matter to be bewailed before the Lord by us this day, and we ought to be affected with the consideration of them.

Unto this great prevalency and predominancy of sin in

the whole nation, there is added a strange and unspeakable security. The truth is, men were a little awakened one while in the nation, when the judgments of God, the pestilence, the fire, the sword, and the year after another warning from heaven were upon us; then there was a little awakening, like a man out of a dead sleep that lifts up his head and rubs his eyes for a time. But I can say this, that it is now towards forty years since God enabled me to observe something in the world, and to my knowledge, I never observed this nation in that state of security, wherein it is at this day. For even in former time there were warnings continually that God had a controversy with the nation, and those that had any fear of God spake one to another about it, and we saw and found their warnings were not in vain. But here is now a general security. Men complain of straits, want, poverty, and the like; but as to any thing wherein God hath to do with the world, either my observation doth greatly deceive me, or I never saw, I think, so general a security as at this day in this nation. And this security hath reached us all, even the churches of God themselves.

These things are matter of fact. The whole question is, Whether we are greatly to be concerned in these things or not? They are the sins of wicked men, and they are the sins of the persecutors of God's people and the like; and what have we to do with them?

The psalmist of old said, that 'Rivers of tears ran down his eyes, because men did not keep the law of God.' And you know that God doth set a special mark upon those, not that are free from the abominations of the age; but upon those that mourn for the abominations that are in the midst of us. It will not be enough for us, that we are free from those abominations, unless we are found to mourn for them. Brethren, our own hearts know we are guilty in this matter, and that we had need seek the face of God this day to give us a deeper sense of these things, than we have obtained. The name of God is blasphemed, the Spirit of God reproached, a flood of iniquity spreads itself over the nation, the land of our nativity, over the inheritance of Christ, over a nation professing the reformed religion; all things go backward; every thing declines. Indeed, brethren, if you will not, I do acknowledge here before you, and to my own shame, I have

great guilt upon me in this matter, that I have not been sensible of the abominations of the nation, so as to mourn for them and be humbled for them, as I ought to have been. And you will do well to search your hearts, and consider how it is with you; whether indeed you have been affected with these things, or whether you have not thought all is well, while all hath been well with yourselves and families, and it may be with the church that may have no trouble upon that account. The security that is upon the nation is dismal, and, I may say, I see no way or means whereby the nation should be freed from this security. The conduct of the ministry which they are under generally, is not able to free them from this security, nor the dispensation of the word; that it seems to be a security from God to lead on the nation to judgment, the means for the removal of it, and the awakening of us being laid aside. And if it comes this way, or that way, any way, though we see not the morning of it, you will find yourselves concerned in it. 'Who may abide the day of his coming!'

We may do well, brethren, to consider the state of the church of God in the world, among ourselves, and our own condition. I need not tell you how it is in the world; but this I can say, that to my apprehensions, the interest of Christ and the gospel was never so fast going down in the world since it came into it, as at this day. I will give you my reason of what I say. When the gospel was first planted and brought into the world, the devil was not able to bring the church into its apostacy, under six, or seven, or eight hundred years, and that by degrees. Since the time of the reformation, the church was progressive for about seventy years; it stood at a stay about the same proportion of time; and ever since, it hath been going backward, straitened in all places, the power of it decays, and the peace of it is taken away, and destruction everywhere seems to lie at the door. Many indeed are in great misery and distress: some I have heard of lately, sold for slaves for the testimony of their conscience. How is it with the church of Christ in this nation? Truly some in great poverty, in great affliction, in great distress; and, I am afraid, we and others have not hearts to relieve them as we ought to do in a due manner: however, let us help them with our prayers. And that which

is worst of all, there seems to me, I must acknowledge it, to be a very great decay in all churches of Christ in the nation, especially among those of us who have had most peace, most prosperity. That which we call zeal for God is almost quite lost among us. Some of us have almost forgot whether there be such a thing as the cause and interest of Christ in the world. We who have cried and prayed about it, and had it upon our hearts, have sat down in our narrow compass, and almost forgot there is such a thing as the interest of Christ in the world, so as to have an active zeal for the ordinances of God according to rule, as God requires of us. Our primitive love, how is it decayed! Value of the ordinances of Christ, and the society of his people for edification, how cold are we grown in these things! How little is the church society upon our hearts, which some of us remember, when it was the very joy of our souls! Truly we have reason to lift up our cry to God, that he would return and visit the churches, and pour out a new, fresh, reviving spirit upon them, that we fall not under the power of these decays, till we come to formality, and God withdraws himself from us, and leaves us, which he seems to be at the very point of doing.

Then, brethren, let us remember our own church, that God would in an especial manner revive the spirit of life, power, and holiness among us: that he would be pleased to help the officers of the church to discharge their duty, and not suffer them to fall under any decay of grace or gifts, unfitting of them to the discharge of their office to the edification of the church: that he would give them also to beware and take heed of formality, as to the exercise of gifts in their administration; and that he would take care of us, since we are apt to fall under these things. Let us pray, that we may be acted by the Spirit of God, and enlivened by the grace of God in all things we do.

Have any of us any particular occasions in reference to temptations, trials, and troubles, we may bear it upon our hearts to the Lord this day. This is much better than by multiplying a company of formal bills. The Lord help us to know the plague of our own hearts, and to be enabled to plead with the Lord upon this opportunity, for grace and mercy to help us in every time of need.

DISCOURSE IV.*

Question. How may we recover from a decay of the principle of grace?

Answer. We have been speaking concerning the decay of the principle of grace; and I will now offer you some few thoughts that may be applied unto our recovery from the decay of this principle; in doing which, I shall tell you no more than I think I have found myself.

If we would recover spiritual life, we must come as near as we can unto, and abide as much as we are able at, the well-head of life. Christ is the spring of our spiritual life; he is every way our life. It is in a derivation of life from Christ, and in conformity to him, that we must look for our spiritual life.

Before I mention how we should approach unto, and lie at this well-head of life, let me observe to you this one thing: That when there is a general contagious disease, the plague, or the like, every man will look to his health and safety with reference to other occasions, but will be most careful in regard to the general contagion. Now, if forsaking this spring of life be the plague of the age, and the plague of the place where we live, and the plague of Christians, we ought to be very careful, lest this general contagion should reach us more or less, one way or other. It is evident to me, who have some advantage to consider things, as much as ordinary men, that the apostacy, the cursed apostacy that spreads itself over this nation, and whose fruits are in all ungodliness and uncleanness, consists in an apostacy from, and forsaking the person of Christ. Some write of how little use the person of Christ is in religion; none, but to declare the doctrine of the gospel to us. Consider the preaching and talk of men. You have much preaching and discourse about virtue and vice; so it was among the philosophers of old; but Jesus Christ is laid aside, quite as a thing forgotten, as if he was of no use, no consideration in religion; as if men knew not at all how to make any use of him, as to living to God.

* Delivered March 24, 1675-6.

This being the general plague, as is evident, of the apostacy of the day wherein we live, if we are wise we shall consider very carefully, whether we ourselves are not influenced, more or less, with it; as where there is a general temptation, it doth, more or less, try all men, the best of believers, and prevail, more or less, upon their spirits. I am afraid we have not, some of us, that love for Christ, that delight in him, nor do make that constant abode with him, as we have done. We have very much lost out of our faith, and our affections, him, who is the life and centre, the glory and the power of all spiritual life, and of all we have to do with God, Jesus Christ himself. I brought it in only to let us know, that if we would revive our spiritual life (and believe it, if any of us are not concerned in our spiritual decays, these are sapless things, and will be heard with as much weariness, as spoken), we are to abide more at the well-head of life: it is the direction of our Lord Jesus Christ, 'Abide in me: unless ye abide in me, you can bring forth no fruit.' And every such branch shall be so and so purged.

But you will say, How shall we do so? How shall we abide, more than we have done, at this well-head of life?

1. We are to abide at the well-head of life by a frequency of the acts of faith upon the person of Christ. Faith is that grace, not only whereby we are implanted into Christ, but whereby we also abide in him: if so, methinks the frequent actings of faith upon the person of Christ, are a drawing near to the well-head of life. And though we are to put forth the vigour, the earnestness, the watchfulness of our hearts unto obedience; yet a ceasing to continue in the acting of faith upon the person of Christ, even under the vigour of our own endeavours by those general, outward desires of walking with God, and living to him, will weaken us, and we shall find ourselves losers by it. Do you all understand me? I am not teaching the wise, and more knowing of the flock; I would speak unto the meanest. I say, suppose we should resolve with great earnestness, diligence, watchfulness to abide in duties, in inward duties, to watch over our hearts, which is required of us; yet, if in our so doing we are taken off thereby from frequent actings of faith upon Christ, as the spring of our life, we shall decay under all our endeavours, watchfulness, and multiplication of duties.

Wherefore, my brethren, let me give you this advice; that you would night and day, upon your beds, in your ways, upon all occasions, have the exercise of faith upon the person of Christ; faith working by a view of him as represented in the gospel, by trust in him, and by invocation of him, that he may be continually nigh unto you. And you cannot have him nigh unto you, unless you make yourselves by these actings of faith, through his grace, continually nigh unto him: so you will abide at the well-head.

I could shew you those excellent advantages that we should have by continually being near to Christ, who is the overflowing spring of grace, and from whence it will issue out to us, if we abide with him, be nigh to him, and keep up to this well-head.

2. Abide with him in love. Oh, the warm affections for Christ, which some of you can witness concerning yourselves, that your hearts have been filled withal towards Christ, when you have been under his call to believe on him! And it is a marvellous way of abiding with Christ, to abide with him by love, which is called 'cleaving to God and Christ;' it is the affection of adhesion, and gives a sense of union.

How then shall we get our hearts to abide with Christ by love?

This is a subject that if I were to preach upon, how many things would presently offer themselves to us, from the excellency of his person, from the excellency of his love, from our necessity of him, the advantages and benefits we have by him, and his kindness towards us? All these things, and many more, would quickly present themselves unto us.

But I will name but one thing, and I name it the rather, because I heard it mentioned in prayer since I came in: Labour to have your hearts filled with a love to Jesus Christ, as there is in him made a representation of all divine excellencies. This was God's glorious design. It is not to be separated from his design of glorifying himself in the work of redemption; for a great part of God's glorious design in the incarnation of Christ, was in him to represent himself unto us, who 'is the image of the invisible God, the express image of his person.' Now if you do but consider Christ, as God is gloriously represented unto you in him, you will find

him the most proper object for divine love, for that love which is wrought in your hearts by the Holy Ghost, for that love that hath sweetness, complacency, satisfaction in it. Then let us remember that we exercise our minds to consider Christ, as all the lovely properties of the divine nature and counsels of his will, as to love and grace, are manifested by Christ.

If we would abide at the well-head of life, we must abide in these things: and let love be excited to Christ under this especial consideration, as he who represents the supreme object of your love, God himself, in all the glorious properties of his nature.

3. Add meditation hereunto; study Christ more, and all things of Christ; delight more in the hearing and preaching of Christ: he is our best friend: let not the difficulties of the mystery of his person and grace deter you. There are wonderful things of the counsels of heaven, and of the glory of the holy God in the person of Christ, as the head of the church; if you would be found inquiring into them, an unsearchable treasure of divine wisdom, grace, and love, are laid up in Christ; therefore meditate upon them more. Let me assure you, this will prove the best expedient for the recovery of our spiritual life. And I will abide by this doctrine to eternity, that without it we shall never recover spiritual life to the glory of God in Christ.

4. And then, brethren, seeing we have in the next place felt decays in the midst of the performance of multiplied duties, labour to bring spirituality into your duties.

What is that, you will say, and wherein doth it consist?

It is the due exercise of every grace that is required to the discharge of that duty. Let every such grace be in its due exercise, and that is to be spiritual in duty: as for instance; would a man be spiritual in all his prayers? Let him then consider what grace, and what exercise of grace is required to this duty: a due fear and reverence of the name of God, faith, love, and delight in him; an humble sense of his own wants, earnest desires of supply, dependance upon God for guidance, and the like. We all know that these are the graces required to the discharge of this duty of praying by the Holy Ghost. And let these graces be in a due exercise, and then you are spiritual in this duty.

Is the duty charity, giving a supply to the poor? There is to be a ready mind, a compassionateness of heart, and obedience unto the command of Christ in that particular; these are the graces required to the discharge of that duty, and to watch against the contrary vices. So that if we would bring spirituality into duty, it is to exercise the graces that are required by the rule to the performance of that duty.

I shall only farther give you this one caution: Have a care that your head in notion, and your tongue in talk, do not too fast empty your hearts of truth: we are apt to lay it up in our heads by notions, and bring it forth in talk, and not let it be in our hearts; and this weakens spiritual life greatly. We hear the word preached, and it is of great concernment what account we shall give of the word that hath been preached unto you; for we that preach must give an account of our preaching; and so must you of what you hear: and many a good word is spoken truly, and yet we see but little fruit of it. And the reason of this is, that some when they hear it, take no farther regard of it, but 'let it slip,' as the apostle speaks, Heb. ii. 1. And if we complain of the treacherousness of our memories, it is the most harmless way of the slipping out of the word. It is not the treachery of our memories, but of our hearts and affections, that makes the heart like a broken vessel, that makes all the rents in it where the water runs out, as the comparison is. The word slips out by putting your affections into carnal exercise; and it quickly finds its way to depart from the heart that gives it no better entertainment. We talk away a sermon, and the sense of it; which robs us both of the sermon, and the fruit of it. A man hears a good word of truth, and instead of taking the power of it into his heart, he takes the notion of it into his mind, and is satisfied therewith: but this is not the way to thrive. God grant that we may never preach to you any thing, but what we may labour to have an experience of the power of it in our own hearts, and to profit ourselves by the word, wherewith we design to profit others. And I pray God grant that you also may have some profit by the word dispensed to you, that it slip not out through carnal affections, and be not drawn out through notions and talk, with a regardlessness to treasure it up in your hearts.

These things we are diligently to attend unto, if we would recover our spiritual losses, that we are complaining of, and that not without just cause.

DISCOURSE V.*

Question. It was queried by some, how we may make our application unto Christ, not in general; but under what notion and apprehension of the person of Christ?

Answer. Because some seem to apprehend there might be danger in terminating our worship upon the nature of Christ as a creature, I shall give you my thoughts and directions in it. And,

First, You must observe, we are to have no conceptions in our acting of any duty towards Christ or about him, but with respect unto his person, as he is God and man in one person. It is not lawful for us to have any apprehensions of Christ, to make any application to him as man only. Nor is it lawful for us to have any apprehensions of him as God only. But all our apprehensions of Christ, and all our addresses unto him, must be as God and man in one person. So he is, andso he will be to all eternity. The union is inseparable and indissoluble. And for any man to make his application unto Christ either as God, or as man, is to set up a false Christ; Christ is God and man in one person, and no other. So in all our actings of faith upon him, and application unto him, we ought to consider him, as he was 'the seed of David,' and as 'God over all blessed for ever,' in one person. This makes the great idolatry among the Papists; in the image of Christ they represent the human nature of Christ separated from his Deity, for they can make no representation of one, that is God and man in one person: hereby they become guilty of double idolatry, referring the mind unto one that is a man, and no more; and doing it by means of an image.

Secondly, The person of Christ is the immediate and proper object of all divine worship. The worship of Christ is commanded in the first commandment. By worship, I in-

* Delivered April 7, 1676.

tend faith, love, trust, subjection of soul, invocation on the name of Christ, every act of the soul and mind, whereby we ascribe infinite divine excellencies unto God, which is the worship of the mind. See John v. 23. 'It is the will of God, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.' How do we honour the Father? By divine faith, trust, love, and worship, making him our end and our reward. So the Son is to be honoured. And as to the divine person of the Son of God, being of the same nature, essence, and substance with the Father, there is no dispute of that among them by whom his Deity is acknowledged.

Thirdly, The divine person of the Son of God lost nothing of his glory and honour, that was due unto him, by the assumption of our human nature. Though thereby he became the Son of man, as well as the Son of God, a Lamb for sacrifice; yet he is still in his whole and entire person, the object of all that worship I spake of before; and the whole church of God agree together in giving that worship unto him, Rev. v. 8, 9. 11—13. 'And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders, fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.' Jesus Christ is here distinguished from the Father; there is 'He that sitteth upon the throne; and the Lamb;' and he is considered as incarnate, as a Lamb slain: and yet there is all the glory, honour, praise and worship, that is given to him that sitteth upon the throne, the Father, given to Jesus Christ, God and man, the Lamb slain, who hath redeemed us with his blood.

Fourthly, This person of Christ, God-man must not be so much as severed by any conception of the mind. For distinction, as God and man he may be considered two ways; either absolutely in himself, or in the discharge of his mediatory office. And this double consideration produceth a double kind of worship to the person of Christ.

1. Consider Christ absolutely in his own person, as the Son of God incarnate, and so he is the immediate and ultimate object of our faith, prayer, and invocation. So that a man may lawfully, under the guidance and conduct of the Spirit of God, direct his prayer immediately to the person of Christ. You have the example of Stephen in his last prayer. 'Lord Jesus,' saith he, 'receive my spirit.' These were the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he died: 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.' And Stephen, when he died, committed his spirit into the hands of Jesus Christ: 'Lord Jesus,' (for that is the name of the Son of God incarnate, 'He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save you from your sins'), 'into thy hands I commit my spirit.' So that a person may make an immediate address in his prayers and supplications unto the person of Christ, as God and man. I look upon it as the highest act of faith that a believer is called unto in this world, to resign a departing soul into his hands, letting go all present things, and future hopes; to resign, I say, a departing soul quietly and peaceably into the hands of Christ. Now this Stephen did with respect unto Jesus; 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' There he left himself by faith. So we may apply ourselves unto him upon any other account, in the acting of faith upon any other occasion.

2. Consider Christ in the discharge of his mediatory office. And under that formal consideration, as discharging his mediatory office, he is not the ultimate object of our faith and invocation; but we call upon God, even the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ. 'We through Christ have believed in God,' saith Peter in one of his epistles. And it implies a contradiction to have it otherwise: for the calling him Mediator sheweth he is a means between God and us; and so it is contradictory to say, our faith is terminated in his mediatory office. This he calls asking the Father in his name. 'You shall ask the Father in my name:' that is, expressly plead the intervention of the mediation of Christ. And so the apostle tells usin that grand rubric and direc-

tory of church worship, Eph. ii. 18. 'By whom we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.' The Father is proposed as the ultimate object of access in our worship; and the Spirit is the effecting cause, enabling us unto this worship, and the Son is the means whereby we approach unto God.

All that I shall add hereunto is this: Seeing there is in Scripture a double worship of Christ that is immediate (for his person is considered absolutely, and as mediator between God and man), which of these ought we principally to apply ourselves unto?

I answer plainly,

(1.) Our direction for solemn worship in the church, generally respects Christ as mediator in Scripture. The general worship that is to be performed unto God in the assemblies of the saints, doth look upon Christ as executing his mediatory office; and so our address is unto the throne of grace by him. By him we enter into the holy place; through him and by him unto God. 'I bow my knees unto [God] the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;' Eph. iii. 12. God, considered as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the proper, ultimate object of the solemn worship of the church.

(2.) In treating and dealing about our own souls, under the conduct of the Spirit of God, it is lawful and expedient for us in our prayers and supplications to mak addresse s to the person of Christ, as Stephen did.

DISCOURSE VI.*

Question. How may we make our addresses to Christ for the exercise of grace; that is, that we may have grace strengthened, and be ready for all exercise? Or, how may we make application to Christ that we may receive grace from him to recover from decays?

Answer. I think the direction given by our Saviour himself is so plain, and doth so fall in with our experience, that we need not look much farther. Saith he, 'Unless ye abide in me, ye cannot bear fruit.' The business we aim at is fruit-bearing; which consists as much in the internal vigor-

* Delivered April 19, 1676.

ous actings of grace, as in the performance of outward duties; to be faithful in our minds and souls, as well as in our lives. The way for that, saith our Saviour, is, 'abide in me.' And unless we do so, he tells us plainly, do we whatever we will else, we 'cannot bring forth fruit.' So that the whole of our fruitfulness depends upon our abiding in Christ: there cannot then be much more said unto this business, but to inquire a little, what it is to abide in Christ.

Certainly it is not a mere not going off from Christ, as we say, a man abides when he doth not go away. For I hope, that under all the decays we have complained of, and want of fruitfulness; yet we have not left Christ, and gone away from him. We have so far abode in him, as the branch abideth in the root, from whence it hath its communication and supplies. Therefore there is something in particular included in this abiding in Christ, dwelling in Christ, and Christ dwelling in us.

And there seems to be this in it, That to abide in Christ, is to be always nigh unto Christ, in the spiritual company of Christ, and in communication with Christ. It doth not lie in a naked, essential act of believing, whereby we are implanted into Christ, and will not go from him; but there is something of an especial, spiritual activity of soul in this abiding in Christ; it is abiding with him, and in his presence.

And as this abiding with Christ must be by some acts of our souls, let us consider what acts those are, which may give a little farther light into this matter. And,

First, It must be certainly by some act of our minds.

Secondly, By some act of our wills.

Thirdly, By some act of our affections.

And thus we abide with Christ, which is the way certainly to bring forth fruit.

First, There is an abiding with Christ in our minds. Now this to me is in contemplation, and thoughts of him night and day: 'I sought him on my bed, in the night,' saith the spouse: to consider very much the person of Christ, to contemplate upon him as vested with his glorious office, and as intrusted and designed by the Father to this work. 'We all,' saith the apostle, 'with open face beholding the glory of God, as in a glass, are changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord.' My brethren!

that which you and I are aiming at, is to be 'changed into the same image;' that is, into the image and likeness of the glory of God in Christ. I dare boldly say, that by those of us, who have reason to have daily apprehensions of our going out of the world, and leaving this state of things, that we have no greater desire, nor is there any thing more frequent in our minds than this, that we may be more and more changed into that image before we go out of this world; for we are looking after perfection in likeness to Christ. Therefore aged Christians especially will bear witness, that there is nothing now we long for more, than to be more and more changed into the image and likeness of Christ. How shall we get to this? Why, saith he, the way is by looking steadily upon Christ, as a man looks with an optic glass to an object at a great distance. We behold him, saith he, by looking steadily upon Christ himself, and the glory of God in him. Now there is a wonderful large object for us to behold; for when you look upon the glory of God in Christ, you have what you please of Christ for the object of your eye and view; the person of Christ, the office of Christ, the merit of Christ, the example of Christ, the death of Christ, and what you will, so you be much intent in your thoughts and minds, much in immediate contemplation about Christ. I do not know how you find it, brethren; but it is the advice I would give you, who are aged Christians, and not likely to continue long in this world, to exercise yourselves in immediate contemplations upon Christ. All the teachings you have had from ministers, the principal end of them have been to enable you to this; and really if I know any thing, we shall find them accompanied with a sweet, transforming power, beyond what we have had experience of in other ways and duties. 'We shall be changed into the same likeness.'

Well then, we abide with Christ in the acts of our mind, by immediate thoughtfulness and contemplation upon Christ in the night, and upon our beds, and in our walkings, and by the way side, and in times we set apart for meditation; we are greatly to labour after an intuitive view of Christ, that is a direct view in the contemplation of Christ.

Secondly, If you will abide with Christ there must be an acting of your will in it also; and that is in great diligence and carefulness about that obedience which Christ doth re-

quire in all the instances of it. This is a great way of abiding with Christ, when we labour to have our wills in a readiness unto all the instances of obedience that Christ requireth at our hands. Let that be the question, whether it be the will of God that we should do thus, or not. And if it be so, pray let us be ready to shew we do abide with Christ, by yielding cheerful and willing obedience to him in this instance and duty which he calleth us unto, and so in all other things. I would have every one of us think often of this matter, what it is Christ requires of me personally, in a way of duty and obedience. And I would have us labour to have in great readiness all things which Christ requires of us. And especially, brethren, I would have this in a readiness, that Christ requires of me to walk very circumspectly and carefully, to keep myself from spots, and pollution, and defilements, by converse in the world. This Christ requires at all times, in all instances, and upon all occasions. What have we been preaching? What have former teachers been instructing us in? All that you are taught is, that you should come to the knowledge of all instances of duty, and the way of them which Christ requires at your hands. And 'if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.'

This is your fruit-bearing, a direct contemplation upon Christ; wherein I would beg, that both you and my own soul might be found more to abound, while we are in this world, and you will find Christ in the discharge of this duty will make very near approaches, and frequent visits to your hearts, more in the discharge of this duty, than of any other; and to have our hearts in a readiness to comply with every instance of obedience Christ requires at our hands.

Thirdly, There is an abiding with Christ in point of affection. There may be love and delight in all these things; if there be not, very spiritual contemplations will be a bar. There is no duty, that is required of any man in this world so spiritual, so heavenly, so evangelical, but through want of love and delight, a man may be slothful in performing of it. I may tie myself to do so this hour, or that hour, and have no benefit to my own soul, nor give any glory unto God, if there be not love and delight in it. They will sweeten the duty, and refresh the heart of God and man, Christ and us. So labour, brethren, and pray greatly for it, that you

may abide with Christ with delight, that you may find a sweetness and refreshment in it, and that every season of retiring unto Christ may bring a kind of spiritual joy and gladness to your hearts. Now you have a great opportunity, having shaken off the occasions of life and other concernments, to dwell with Christ, now it is a good time.

DISCOURSE VII.*

Question. When our own faith is weakened as to the hearing of our prayers; when we ourselves are hindered within ourselves from believing the answer of our prayers; have no ground to expect we should be heard, or ground to believe we are heard: what are those things, that greatly weaken our faith, as to the answer of our prayers; that though we continue to pray, yet our faith is weakened as to the hearing of our prayers? And what are the grounds that weaken men's faith in such a state?

Answer. If our hearts are not duly prepared to the consideration of the great and glorious properties, presence, and holiness of God, and duly affected with them in our preparation for prayer, it is certain we can have no faith for the hearing of our prayers.

It is also of great importance, that we consider aright in what state the things we seek for are promised; whether temporal things, that are left to God; or spiritual, that lie under a promise, and so we may press God immediately about them.

There are two things that are certainly great weakeners of our faith as to God's hearing our prayers.

First, The one is, that intermixture of self, which is apt to creep into our prayers, in public especially, in the congregation and assemblies, self-reputation in the exercise of gifts, or whatever it be, weakens our faith as to the expectation of God's hearing our prayers.

Secondly, The other is, that we pray with earnestness and fervency, with noise and clamour of speech; but do not industriously pursue the things we pray for. Unless we

* Delivered March 22, 1676.

watch and follow after these things, we shall not have ground of faith for the hearing of our prayers. As for instance; when the soul is burdened with a corruption, there is nothing we are more fervent in prayer unto God against; yet when we have done this, we take no more care to get it mortified. Where is our faith, that our prayers may be heard in this thing? we must pursue our prayers, or it will weaken our faith as to the hearing of them. We all pray; but do we believe that God will hear and answer our prayers?

I shall not speak unto the nature of that faith we exercise, or what assurance we may have of God's hearing our prayers; but I will tell you plainly what hinders in us the answer of our prayers.

1. We are not clear that our persons are accepted. God had respect unto Abel, and his offering; and not unto Cain, and his offering. We can have no more faith that our prayers are heard, than we have faith that our persons are accepted. How many of us are dubious, and know not whether we believe or no? or are the children of God or no? According as our faith is, as to the acceptance of our persons; so ordinarily our faith will be, as to the hearing of our prayers. I do acknowledge, that sometime under extraordinary darkness, or temptation, whilst a person doth not at all know, nor hath any assurance, what is his own condition, whether approved, or rejected of God; yet the Holy Spirit of God many times gives assurance of the hearing of that prayer, which is poured out in the anguish of the soul. But let us bring things unto a good issue between God and our souls, and not complain that our prayers are not heard, when we are negligent to come unto the assurance of faith about the acceptance of our persons. We have had many days of prayer, and have not seen that return of our prayer, that we designed. This evil lies at the bottom, that we have been dubious as to our state of acceptance with God. Let us labour to amend it.

2. Another thing is this; pray while you will, you will not believe your prayers are answered, if you indulge any private lust, or do not vigorously endeavour the mortification of it, according to what the Scripture and duty require. If any lust ariseth in the soul, and we do not

immediately engage to mortify it, as God requires, it will break out, and weaken our faith in all our prayers. Therefore if you will be helped to believe the answer of your prayers, labour to search your hearts. Do not think that no corruption is indulged, but such as break out into open sin. It may be, you do not know the corruption you indulge; labour therefore to find it out, and you will find how your faith is weakened thereby.

3. Again, want of having treasured up former experiences of the hearing of prayer. We have not provided as we ought in this matter. If we had laid up manifold experiences of God's having heard our prayers, it would strengthen our faith that God doth hear them. It may be some have prayed all their days, God hath kept their souls alive, that they have not wickedly departed from God, and they have obtained particular mercies; why such ought to keep a constant record of God's hearing their prayers. Every discovery made of Christ that draws our souls more to love him, and engageth us to cleave unto him, is our experience of God's hearing our prayers.

4. I might add; when we ourselves are not sensible that we arise unto that fervency of prayer, that is required of them that believe. If we pray in the congregation, in our closets, or families, and when we have done are not sensible that we have risen up unto that fervency that is required, we cannot believe our prayers are answered.

It is the duty of all men to pray unto the Lord; but it is incumbent on none more than those, who have really and sincerely given up themselves unto God, and yet in truth have no comfortable persuasion concerning their condition. That is a state wherein I am so far from discouraging prayer, that it is your season for prayer, in the whole of your lives. When Paul was first called, before such time as he had evidence of the pardon of his sins, it is said, 'Behold, he prays.' If they truly attend unto their state and condition, they may be sure to be the persons of whom also it will be said, Behold, they pray. And even in these prayers they may exercise faith, when they have not faith to believe that their prayers are heard. But while in this condition, it will be hard to believe that their prayers are heard, when they cannot believe that their persons are accepted.

DISCOURSE VIII.

Question. When may any one sin, lust, or corruption be esteemed habitually prevalent?

Answer. I shall premise some few things, before I come to answer the question.

First, All lusts and corruptions whatsoever, have their root and residence in our nature, the worst of them. For, saith the apostle, Jam. i. 14. 'Every man is tempted of his own lust.' Every man hath his own lust, and every man hath all lust in him; for this lust, or corruption, is the depravation of our nature, and it is in all men. And in the root and principle of it, it is in all men even after their conversion. So saith the apostle concerning believers, Gal. v. 17. 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that ye' (believers) 'cannot do the things that ye would.' What doth the flesh lust unto? Why it lusts unto the works of it. What are they? Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, sedition, heresy, envy, murder, drunkenness, revelling, and such like. The flesh lusteth unto all these things in believers, the worst things that can be mentioned. Whence is that of our Saviour, which yields to me a doctrine which is a sad truth; but so plain, that nothing can be more. He foretells marvellous troubles, great desolations and destructions, that shall come upon the world, and befall all sorts of men, and says, it is a day that as 'a snare shall come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.' Nothing makes me more believe that day, that terrible day of the Lord, is coming upon the face of the whole earth, than this, that it comes as 'a snare.' Men do not take notice of it, do you therefore take heed to yourselves, you that are my disciples, believers, 'take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you at unawares.' The doctrine I observe from thence is this: That the best of men have need to be warned, to take care of the worst of sins in the approach of the worst of times. Who would think, when such troubles, distresses, desolations, were coming upon a nation, in

that place the disciples of Christ should be in danger of being overtaken with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life? Yet he, who is the wisdom of God, knew how it would be with us. Nay, what if a man should say from observation, that professors are never more in danger of sensual, provoking sins, than when destruction is lying nearest at the door? 'In that day,' saith he, 'take care.'

Secondly, Another thing I would premise is this: That this root of sin abiding in us, as I have shewed, will upon its advantage, work unto all sorts of evils; which should give us a godly jealousy over our souls, and over one another. Saith the apostle, Rom. vii. 8. 'Sin wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.'

Thirdly, If it be so, that sin doth thus always abide in us, and will upon occasions work to all its fruit, to all manner of concupiscence; then the mortification of sin is a continual duty, that we ought to be exercised in all our days. Col. iii. 3. 'Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.' A blessed state and condition! I desire no better attainment in this world, than this holds out. But what duty does the apostle infer from thence? 'Therefore,' saith he, 'mortify your members, which are upon the earth.' What, I pray? 'Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affections, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.' The mortification of sin is a duty incumbent upon the best of saints.

Fourthly, The fourth thing I would premise is this: That a particular sin doth not obtain a signal prevalency, without it hath some signal advantage: for our corrupt nature is universally and equally corrupt; but a particular sin obtains prevalency by particular advantages.

It would be too long to speak of all those advantages; I shall name two, whereunto others may be reduced.

1. The inclination of constitution gives particular advantages unto particular sins. Some may be very much inclined to envy; some to wrath and passion; and others to sensual sins, gluttony, drunkenness, uncleanness, to name the things which our Saviour names, and warns us of. It is with respect hereunto, that David said he 'would keep himself from his iniquity,' as some think. I have only this to say; that it hath been much from the fallacy of the devil, that men have

been apt to plead constitution, and the inclination of their constitution to the extenuation of their sin, when indeed it is an aggravation. I am apt to be passionate in my nature, saith one; I am sanguine, saith another, and love company. They make their natural inclinations to be a cover and excuse for their sin. But this I must say as my judgment, that if grace does not cure constitution sins, it hath cured none; and that we can have no trial of the efficacy of grace, if we have it not in curing constitution sins. The great promise is, that it shall change the nature of the wolf and the lion, of the bear, the asp, and the cockatrice, and that they shall become as lambs; which it can never do, if it doth not change it by an habitual counterworking of inclinations arising from constitution. If grace being habitual doth not change the very inclination of constitution, I know not what it doth. That is the first advantage whereby particular sins come to have signal advantage and prevalency.

2. Outward occasions. And I refer them unto two heads.

(1.) To education; particular sins get advantage by education. If we do even in education instruct our children to pride by their fineries, and deportment to themselves, if we teach them to be proud, we heap dry fuel upon them, till such time as lust will flame. Let us take heed of this. It is an easy thing to bring forth a proud generation by such means.

(2.) Society in the world, according to occasion of life, is that which inflames particular corruptions. According as men delight in their converse, so corruption will be provoked and heightened by it.

I have spoke all these things previously to shew you where lies the nature and principle of the danger we are going to inquire into, and how it comes to that condition.

Now I shall inquire a little into the question itself: How we may know whether a particular corruption be habitually predominant or no?

Brethren, I take it for granted, the vilest of those lusts which our Saviour and his apostles warn us against to mortify and crucify, may be working in the hearts and minds of the best of us; and that a particular lust may be habitually prevalent, where, for particular reasons, it never brings forth

outward effects; therefore, look to yourselves. I say then, when the mind and soul is frequently and greatly, as there are occasions, urged upon and pressed with a particular lust and corruption, this doth not prove that particular lust and corruption to be habitually prevalent; for it may be a temptation. This may all proceed from the conjunction of temptation with indwelling sin, which will make it fight and war, and use force, and lead captive.

But suppose a person be in that condition, how shall he know whether it be a temptation in conjunction with indwelling sin in general? Or, whether it be an habitual prevalency of a particular corruption?

I answer,

I. It is not from the prevalency of corruption these three ways:

1. If the soul be more grieved with it, than defiled by it, it is a temptation, and not a lust habitually prevalent. In this case, when a heart is so solicited with any sin, sin and grace are both at work, and have their contrary aims. The aim of grace is to humble the soul, and the aim of sin to defile it. And the soul is so far defiled, as by the deceitfulness and solicitations of sin, consent is obtained. Defilement ariseth not from temptation, as active upon the mind; but from temptation, as admitted with consent: so far as it consents, whether by surprisal, or long solicitations, so far it is defiled. It is otherwise if the soul be more grieved with it, than defiled by it.

2. It is so when the soul can truly, and doth look upon that particular corruption, as its greatest and most mortal enemy. It is not soldiers who have ruined my estate, nor a disease that hath taken away my health, nor enemies who have ruined my name or opposed me; but this corruption, which is my great and mortal enemy. When the soul is truly under this apprehension, then it is to be hoped, it is the power of temptation; and not the prevalency of lust, or corruption.

3. It is so also when a man maintains his warfare and his conflict with it constantly, especially in those two great duties of private prayer and meditation; which if once the soul be beat off from, it is driven out of the field, and sin is

conqueror. But so long as a man maintains the conflict in the exercise of grace in those duties, I look upon it as a temptation, and not an habitual, prevalent lust.

II. I shall now proceed to shew when a corruption is habitually prevalent.

And here is a large field before me, but I shall only speak some few things.

1. When a man doth choose, or willingly embrace known occasions of his sin, that sin is habitually prevalent. There is no man that hath the common understanding of a Christian, and hath any corruption or lust working in him, but he knows what are the occasions that provoke it. No man, unless he is profligately wicked, can choose sin for sin's sake. But he who knows what are the occasions that stir up, excite, and draw forth any particular corruption, and doth choose them, or willingly embrace them, there is the habitual prevalency of sin to a high degree in the mind of that man, whosoever he be: for sin is to be rejected in the occasion of it, or it will never be refused in the power of it.

2. Let a man fear it is so, when he finds argument against it to lose their force. No man is under the power of particular corruption, but will have arguments suggested to his mind from fear, danger, shame, ruin, against continuing under that corruption. When a man begins to find these arguments abate in their force, and have not that prevalency upon his mind they have had, let him fear there is an habitual prevalency of his corruption.

3. When a man upon conviction is turned out of his course, but is not turned aside from his design, when he traverseth his way like the wild ass: 'In her occasion who shall turn her aside?' If you meet her, or pursue her, you may turn her out of her way; but still she pursues her design. Men meet with strong convictions of sin, strong rebukes and reproofs; this a little puts them out of their way, but not from their design or inclination; the bent of their spirit lies that way still, and the secret language of their heart is, that it was free with me, to be as in former days. Certainly a corruption is habitually prevalent, if it seldom or never fails to act itself under opportunities and temptations. If a man who trades cheats every time he is able to do so, he hath covetousness in his heart. Or if a man when-

ever opportunity and occasion meet together to drink, doth it to excess; this is a sign of an habitual corruption, if he be not able to hold out scarce at any time against a concurrence of temptation and opportunity.

4. When the soul, if it will examine itself, will find it is gone from under the conduct of renewing grace, and is at the best but under the evidence of restraining grace. Believers are under the conduct of renewing grace, and I grant that sometimes, when under the power of corruption and temptation, even they have broken the rule of renewing grace, God will keep them in order by restraining grace, by fear of danger, shame, and infamy; by outward considerations set home upon the mind by the Spirit of God, which keeps them off from sin; but this is but sometimes. But if a man finds his heart wholly got from under the rule of renewing grace, and that he hath no leading or conduct but restraining grace, his sin hath got the perfect victory over him; that is, he would sin on to the end of his life, were it not for fear of shame, danger, death, and hell; he is no longer acted by renewing grace, which is faith and love, faith working by love. A man who hath a spiritual understanding may examine himself, and find under what conduct he is.

5. Lastly, when there is a predominant will in sinning, then lust is habitually prevalent. Sin may entangle the mind, and disorder the affections, and yet not be prevalent; but when it hath laid hold upon the will, it hath the mastery.

DISCOURSE IX.*

Question. WHETHER lust or corruption habitually prevalent, be consistent with the truth of grace?

Answer. This is a hard question, there are difficulties in it, and it may be it is not precisely to be determined. I am sure we should be wonderful careful what we say upon such a question, which determines the present and eternal condition of the souls of men.

* Delivered April 19, 1677.

Supposing we retain something of what was spoken in stating a lust or corruption so habitually prevalent, because this is the foundation of our present inquiry, I shall bring what I have to say upon this question to a few heads, that they may be remembered.

I say then,

First, It is the duty of every believer to take care, that this may never be his own case practically. We shall meet with straits enough, and fears enough, and doubts enough about our eternal condition, though we have no lust, nor corruption habitually prevalent. Therefore, I say, it is the duty of every believer to take care this may never be his case: David did so, Psal. xix. 12, 13. 'Who can understand his errors?' saith he, 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins: then shall I be upright, and free from the great offence.' He acknowledges his errors and sins, and prays for cleansing, purifying, pardon; but for presumptuous sins, sins with a high hand, and every habitual corruption which hath something of presumption, Lord, 'keep back thy servant from them,' saith he. The apostle's caution is to the same purpose, Heb. xii. 15. 'Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest a root of bitterness spring up.' There is the root of bitterness in every one, which I look upon as a corruption in some measure habitual, if it springs up unto great defilement. And I beseech you, brethren, beg of God for your own souls and mine, that we may be careful this be never our case.

Secondly, The second thing I would observe is this: Whatever may be said concerning its consistency with grace, it is certainly inconsistent with peace. I wish we would remember what description was given before of this prevalent corruption, that we might consider the things now applied unto it. Here though I would be as tender, as of the apple of mine eye, in these things, I will not fear to say this: that the peace which any one hath concurring with a prevalent corruption, is security, not peace. I know men may be at great peace under prevalent corruptions, and live upon good hopes, that they shall be accepted with God, that it shall be well with them in the latter end, and that they shall have power one time or other against this corruption,

and will leave it when it is seasonable, and strive against it more than they have done. But all such peace is but security. Under prevalent corruption there is a drawing back; for I would state the matter thus: a person who is a professor, and hath kept up to duties and obedience, till some lust hath gotten strength by constitution, temptations, or occasions of life, and hath drawn him off from his former renovation in walking with God; there is then a drawing back. 'Now,' saith the apostle, 'if any man draw back, my soul hath no pleasure in him;' Heb. x. 38. And when God hath no pleasure according to the several degrees of backsliders (it may be that is meant of final apostacy), he doth not intimate any thing that is a ground of peace to that soul. So Isa. lvii. 17. 'For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and hid myself from him.' If there be an incurable iniquity of covetousness, or any other iniquity, whether manifest unto us or no, God is angry and doth hide himself from us. I pray, brethren, let us examine our peace; and if we find we have a peace that can maintain its ground and station under prevalent corruption, trust no more to that peace, it will not stand us in stead when it comes to a trial.

Thirdly, The third thing I would say is this: That if a prevalent corruption be not inconsistent with the truth of grace, it is certainly inconsistent with the true exercise of grace. It is not indeed inconsistent with the performance of duties, but it is inconsistent with the true exercise of grace in the performance of duties. It is often seen and known, that persons under prevalent corruption will multiply duties, thereby to quiet conscience, and to compensate God for what they have done amiss. Persons may multiply prayers, follow preaching, and attend to other duties, when they use all these things, through the deceitfulness of sin, but as a cloak unto some prevailing corruption. But in all those duties there is no true exercise of grace.

The true determination of this question depends upon a right exposition of 1 John ii. 15. if we could understand that verse, it determines this point: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' There is the question whether prevalent corruption be inconsistent with true grace? I know the words may have this construction, If any man

do make the world his chiefest good, if any man put the world in the place of God, then the love of the Father is not in him; he hath either received no love from God, or he hath no love to God, as a Father in Christ. But indeed, the apostle speaking unto believers, I am apt to think, speaks not of the whole kind, but degrees: if there be a prevalency of love of the world, there is no prevalency of the actings of the love of the Father; that they do not concern the habitual principles of the love of the world, and of the love of the Father, but the prevailing actings of the one and the other. And accordingly it may be said of all other graces whatsoever, that where there is a prevalency of the acting of sin, there is a suspension of the exercise of grace. Brethren, if any of us have been under the power of prevalent corruption (I will be still tender, and speak what ought to be received and believed, whether people do or not), it is much to be feared, we have lost all our prayers and hearing, because we have not had a true exercise of grace in them. Some exercise there may be, but a due and true exercise of grace will be laid asleep by prevalent corruption. And therefore let us take heed of prevalent corruption, as we would take heed of losing all things that we have wrought, our praying, hearing, suffering, charity, for want of a due exercise of grace in them.

Fourthly, I shall grant this, that spiritual life may be in a swoon, when the spiritual man is not dead. There is a kind of deliquium of the spirits, called swooning away, that may befall believers, which suspends all acts of life, when yet the man is not dead. So I say, though I should see a man through the prevalency of corruption have all the evidences of a spiritual life cast into a swoon, yet I will not presently conclude the spiritual man is dead. Take the case of David, from the time of his great fall and transgression in the matter of Uriah, until the coming of Nathan the prophet. Persons are generally inclined to believe that the spiritual life was in a swoon, when the spiritual man was not dead. His fall, as an honest man said, beat the breath out of his body, and he lay a long time like a man dead, by reason of that power, which one signal sin left in his soul. And take that as a great instance, that one sin, not immediately taken off

by great humiliation, leaves great and even habitual inclinations in the soul to the same sin. So that some ascribed it unto the corruption of our nature. For it is a great and difficult question in divinity, how one particular sin, as the sin of Adam was, should bring in habitual corruption to our nature. To which some answer thus: That any one, single, moral act performed with a high hand, hath great obliquity in it, disposing our whole nature to corruption. David, by that single act of flagrant wickedness, did continue in it for so long a space of time, till Nathan came and administered some good spirits to him that relieved him out of his swoon. Wherefore I say that I will not judge a person to be spiritually dead, whom I have judged formerly to have had spiritual life, though I see him at present in a swoon as to all evidences of the spiritual life. And the reason why I will not judge so, is this; Because if you judge a person dead, you neglect him, you leave him; but if you judge him in a swoon, though never so dangerous, you use all means for the retrieving of his life. So ought we to do to one another, and our own souls.

Fifthly, There is a prevalency of sin that is inconsistent with true grace, which may befall those who have been professors. So the apostle doth plainly declare. Rom. vi. 16. 'Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' There is such a serving of sin, as puts a man into a contrary state.

Sixthly, I shall add but one thing more, and that is this: There may be a corruption, sin, or lust, habitually prevalent as to whatsoever evidences the person in whom it is, or others can discern; and yet the root of the matter, the root of spiritual life be notwithstanding in the person.

Suppose then there be such a prevalency, that the soul judges to be habitual, how shall we know, whether the root of the matter be in such a person or no?

If the soul hath any thing left of spiritual life, there will be something of vital operations in that soul. Now the vital operations that give evidence the soul is not absolutely slain by prevalent corruption, are opposition, and humiliation. So long as the soul, though it be never so much captivated, is

conscious to itself of a sincerity in the opposition it makes, there is an evidence of a vital operation, as likewise where it is constant in its humiliation on that account.

But if it be farther inquired how it may be known that this humiliation is sincere?

I answer, It cannot be known from its vigour and efficacy; for that overthrows the question. For if the opposition was vigorous and effectual, it would break the power of lust and corruption, so that it would be no more prevalent. But two ways it may be known.

1. By its constancy. If the root of the matter be still in us, there will be a constant opposition to every act of any prevailing corruption whatsoever. I do not speak about violent temptations, but ordinary cases, in which I know not whence we should conclude the root of the matter is in that man, who doth not make a sincere opposition to every instance of the acting of prevalent corruption. If a man can pass over one and another instance of prevalent corruption without any humiliation for it, the holy sovereign God shew him grace and mercy; but it is to me the way of a serpent upon a stone, I see it not, I know it not.

2. It is sincere if it be from its proper spring, that is, if the opposition be not from conviction, light, or conscience only; but from the will of the poor sinner. I would do otherwise, I would have this sin destroyed, I would have it rooted out, that it should be no more in me, my will lies against it, however it hath captivated my affections and disturbed my course.

This is all I dare say upon this question: that there may be an habitual prevalency of corruption which may seem so to them in whom it is, as also to those who converse with them, and yet the root of the matter be in them. We may know the root of the matter by the acting of spiritual life, in opposition going before, and humiliation coming after. We may know the sincerity of these vital actings by their constancy, and by their spring, if we are constant in them, and if they arise from our wills.

DISCOURSE X.*

Question. WHAT shall a person do who finds himself under the power of a prevailing corruption, sin, or temptation?

Answer. I shall premise only this one thing, and then inquire whether it belongs to us, or no.

This prevalency hath many degrees. It may be a prevalency to outward scandal, or to the utter loss of inward peace, or to the disquieting and divesting of us of that tranquillity of mind, usually which Christ calleth us unto. Now pray consider, that I speak to it equally and in every degree. And perhaps there may be none of us, but at one time or other, after inquiry, will have had experience in one degree or other, either to disquietment, loss of peace, or scandal.

What shall such a person then do, who finds it so with him?

I answer,

First, He should labour to affect his mind with the danger of it. It is not conceivable how subtle sin is to shift off an apprehension of the danger of it. Notwithstanding this, says the man, yet I hope I am in a state of grace, and shall be saved, and come to the issue of it at one time or other: and so the mind keeps off a due sense of the danger of it. I beseech you, brethren and sisters, that if this be your condition, labour to affect your minds, that this state, as far as I know, will end in hell. And let not your minds be relieved from the apprehension, that upon due and good grounds of faith, these ways go down to the chambers of death. Do not please yourselves imagining you are members of the church, and have good hopes of salvation by Jesus Christ; but consider whither this tends; and affect your minds with it.

Secondly, When the person is affected with the danger of it, the next thing to be done is, to burden his conscience with the guilt of it. For the truth is, as our minds are upon many pretences slow to apprehend the danger of sin; so our consciences are very unwilling to take the weight of the burden of it, as to its guilt. I speak not of men of

* Delivered May 4, 1677.

seared consciences, that lay what weight you will upon them, will feel none; but even the consciences of renewed men, unless they use all the ways and means whereby conscience may be burdened, as by apprehensions of the holiness of God, of the law, of the love of Christ, and of all those things whereby conscience must be made to feel the weight of its guilt. No sooner doth it begin to be made a little sick with a sense of the guilt of sin, but it takes a cordial presently. Here this sin hath taken place, it hath contracted this and that guilt; I have been thus long negligent in this or that duty; I have thus long engaged in this and that folly, and been so given up unto the world; I must take to Christ by faith, or I am undone: it is afraid of making its load. But let conscience bear the burden, and not easily shift it off, unless it can, by true faith guided by the word, load it upon Christ, which is not a thing of course to be done.

Thirdly, What shall we do in case we have this apprehension of its danger, and can be thus burdened with its guilt? Pray for deliverance. How? You will say, There is in the Scriptures mention of 'roaring;' Psal. xxxii. 3. The voice of my roaring. And likewise of 'shouting;' Lam. iii. 3. 'I shouted and cried.' This is a time to pray, that God would not hide his face from our roaring, nor shut out our prayers when we shout unto him; that is, to cry out with all the vigour of our souls. Christ is able 'to succour' and help them that 'make an outcry' to him. The word signifies so, and our word 'succour,' signifies a running in to help a man who is ready to be destroyed. These may seem hard things to us, but it is a great thing to save our souls, and to deliver ourselves from the snares of Satan.

Fourthly, Treasure up every warning, and every word that you are convinced was pointed against your particular corruption. There is none of you who may have the power of particular corruptions, but God at one time or other in his providence or word, gives particular warning, that the soul may say, This is for me, I must comply with it: but 'it is like a man that sees his face in a glass, and goes away, and immediately forgets what manner of man he was:' there is an end of it. But if God give you such warnings, set them down, treasure them up, lose them not, they must be

accounted for. 'He that being often reproved, hardens his heart, shall perish suddenly, and that without remedy.'

Fifthly, I shall mind you of two rules, and so have done.

1. In your perplexities, as to the power of sin, exercise faith, that notwithstanding all, you see and find that you are almost lost and gone, there is a power in God, through Christ, for the subduing and conquering of it.

2. It is in vain for any to think to mortify a prevailing sin, who doth not at the same time endeavour to mortify all sin, and to be found in every duty. Here is a person troubled and perplexed with a temptation or corruption; both are the same in this case: he cries, O, that I were delivered; I had rather have deliverance than life; I will do my endeavour to watch against it. But it may be this person will not come up to a constancy in secret prayer; he will go up and down, and wish himself free, but will not be brought up to such duties wherein those lusts must be mortified. Therefore take this rule along with you; never hope to mortify any corruption whereby your hearts are grieved, unless you labour to mortify every corruption by which the Spirit of God is grieved; and be found in every duty, especially those under which grace thrives and flourishes.

DISCOURSE XI.

Question. WHAT is our duty with respect to dark and difficult dispensations of God's providence in the world?

Answer. In answer unto this question, three things are to be considered.

First, What are, in a Scripture sense, those things that make a season of providence dark and difficult?

Secondly, What are the open signs of the coming and passing of such a season over us? And,

Thirdly, What are our special duties in reference to our entering into, and passing through, such a season?

First, What are those things that make a season of providence dark and difficult?

I find four things in Scripture that make a dark season of providence; and, if I mistake not, they are all upon us.

1. The long-continued prosperity of wicked men. This you are sensible is the most known case of all the Old Testament, Psal. lxxiii. Jer. xii. 1—3. Hab. i. 4. 13. and many other places. The holy men of old did confess themselves in great perplexity at the long-continued prosperity of wicked men, and their long-continued prosperity in ways of wickedness. Give but this one farther circumstance to it, the long-continued prosperity of wicked men, in their wickedness when the light shines round about them to convince them of that wickedness, and God speaks in and by the light of his word against them, that is a trial. When all things were wrapped up in darkness and idolatry, it is no wonder at the patience of God; but when things come in any place to that state, that many continue prosperous in wickedness when the day is upon them that judges them, it is a difficulty.

2. It is a difficult season of providence, when the church is continued under persecution and distress in a time of prayer, when they give themselves to prayer. The difficulty seems mentioned, Psal. lxxx. 4. 'O Lord, how long wilt thou smoke against the prayer of thy people?' This made it hard, that God should afflict his church, and keep her under distresses, and suffer the furrows to be made long upon her back, and continue her under oppression from one season to another; there may be evident reason for that. But, saith God, 'Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear.' God hath promised to hear the church. 'Will not God avenge the elect that call upon him day and night? He will do it speedily.' Now when God seems to be angry with the prayers of his people, that is a difficult season: when they cry and shout and God shuts out their prayers, that makes a dark providence.

As the other difficulty is evidently upon us; so I hope we have this difficulty to conflict withal, that the anger of God continues to smoke against the prayers of his people, as having stirred up many a blessed cry to himself, for there is a time when he will hear and answer their prayers.

3. It is a dark and difficult dispensation of providence, when the world, and nations of the world, are filled with confusion and blood, and no just reason appearing why it should

be so. When our Saviour foretells a difficult season, Matt. xxiv. and Luke xxi. he says, There shall be terrible times, such as never were; nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be wars, bloodshed, and earthquakes; and the very elect shall hardly escape. Therefore God calls such a time, a day of darkness, yea, of thick darkness, Joel ii. 2. a dark gloomy day. There is nothing to be seen in all the confusions that are in the world at this day, but that the frogs of unclean spirits are gone forth to stir up the lusts of men to make havoc of one another.

4. It adds greatly to the difficulty of a season, when we have no prospect whither things are tending, and what will be their issue.

There are two ways whereby we may have a prospect of things that are in being: By the eye of God's providence, when we perceive which way that looks: and by Scripture rule. The truth is, we are in a time wherein no man can discern a fixed eye of providence looking this way or that way. What will be the issue of these things; whether it will be the deliverance of the church, or the desolation of the nation and straitening of the church; whether God will bring good out of them in this generation, or any other time, none knows: this makes it difficult. Psal. lxxiv. 9. 'We see not our signs,' have no tokens what God intends to do, 'neither is there among us any to tell us how long.'

There is none of these things but make a season difficult, and providence dark; but when all of them concur together, they cannot but greatly heighten it: and I think they are all upon us.

Secondly, What are the open signs of the coming and passing of such a season over us?

There are three tokens or outward evidences of a difficult season. It is so,

1. When God's patience is abused. You know that place, Eccles. viii. 11. 'Because judgment is not speedily executed upon an evil work, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.' Things pass thus; men fall into wickedness, great wickedness; their consciences fly in their faces, and they are afraid; the power of their lusts carry them into the same wickedness again, and

their consciences begin to grow a little colder than they were; no evil comes of it; and judgment is not speedily executed; and so their hearts at last come to be wholly set to do evil. Hence others that look on say, here are men given up to all wickedness, surely judgment will speedily come upon these men; judgment doth not come, God is patient, and so they themselves turn as wicked as the former. Abusing of God's patience is an evident sign of a dispensation of the displeasure of God in his providence: and if ever it was upon any, it is upon us, and men learn it more and more every day. Every one talks of other men's sins, and seeing no judgment falls upon them, they give up themselves to the same sins.

2. It is so when God's warnings are despised. 'When thine hand is lifted up, they will not see. That is a difficult season, for, saith God, 'The fire of thine adversaries shall consume them.' Never had people more warnings than we have had; warning in heaven above, and warning on the earth beneath; warnings by lesser judgments, and warnings by greater; and warnings by the word. God's hand hath been lifted up, but who takes notice of it? Some despise it, and others talk of it as a tale to be told, and there is an end of it. Who sanctifies the name of God in all the warnings that are given us? 'The Lord's voice crieth unto the city,' Micah vi. 9. but it is only 'the man of wisdom,' of substance, that seeth the name of God in these his cries unto the city by his warnings from heaven and earth, signs and tokens, and great intimations of his displeasure.

3. An inclination in all sorts of people to security, and to take no notice of these things. I have spoken unto this business of security formerly, and I pray God warn you and myself of it; for I believe none of us are such strangers to our hearts, but we can say, that under all these warnings there is an inclination to security; if God did not prevent it, we should fall fast asleep under all the judgments that are round about us.

Any of these things shew that we are under a difficult dispensation of providence; but where all concur, God be merciful to such a people: it is the opening of the door to let out judgments to the uttermost.

Now if this be such a season, as I do verily believe we are all sensible it is; then,

Thirdly, What shall we do? What are our special duties in reference to our entering into, and passing through, such a season?

I might speak unto the peculiar exercise of those graces which are required unto such a season; as faith, resignation to the will of God, readiness for his pleasure, waiting upon God, weanedness from the world, and the like; but I will only give you three or four duties, which are peculiarly hinted in such a season, and so have done.

1. Our first duty is, that we should meet together, and confer about these things: Mal. iii. 16, 17. A good place in difficult seasons, such as some of us have seen. The day of the Lord was coming that would burn as an oven: 'Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.' When was this? In a time of great judgment, and great sin: 'When they called the proud happy, and they that wrought wickedness were set up, and they that tempted God were even delivered:' that is, 'appeared to be delivered.' It is the great duty of us all, as we have opportunity and occasion, to confer about these things; about the causes of them; what ariseth from the profane, wicked world; what from a persecuting, idolatrous world; and (wherein we are more concerned) what from a professing generation; and see how we can sanctify the name of God in it. We might have as great advantages as any under the face of heaven for the discharge of this duty, if we did but make use of that prize which God hath put into our hands; but if we are fools, and have no heart to improve it, the blame will be our own. You have opportunities for meeting and assembling; I fear there are cold affections in your private meetings, I wish there be not. It may be some thrive and grow; I hope so: and others are cold and backward, it is not a season for it. If God would help us to manage this church aright, and as we ought

to do, there can be no greater advantage under such a season, than we enjoy; but we want voluntary inspection; and the Lord lay it not to our charge we have deferred it so long. Much want of love might have been prevented, many duties furthered, and many evils removed, if we had come up to the light God hath given to us. But we are at a loss, and God knows we suffer under it for want of discharging our duty.

That is the first thing, to speak often one to another; to sanctify the name of God by an humble, diligent inquiry into the causes of these dispensations, and preparation for these things.

2. The second duty in such a season, is privately for every one of us to inquire of Jesus Christ in prayer and supplication, what shall be the end of these things: you have a great instance of it, Dan. viii. 13, 14. 'Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.' I suppose there is something of the ministry of angels in it; for this saint inquires, but the answer is made to Daniel: 'One saint said unto another saint, and he said unto me.' But the speaking saint was Jesus Christ. There was the Holy One that spake, which he calls פלמוני 'a certain saint;' but the derivation of the word is, 'One that revealeth secrets.' There was application made unto Jesus Christ, who is the revealer of secrets, to know how long. And you will find in the Scriptures, in difficult dispensations, that is very many times the request of the saints to God: How long? Dan. xii. 6. 8. 'How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?' And, 'O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?' There is an humble application by faith and prayer unto Jesus Christ, to know the mind of God in these things, that will bring satisfaction into our souls. Do not leave yourselves to wander in your own thoughts and imaginations. It is impossible but we shall be debating things, and giving a rational account of them; but all will not bring us satisfaction. But let us go

to Jesus Christ, and say to him, 'O Lord, how long?' And he will give in secret satisfaction to our souls.

This is the second thing: frequently confer about these things; and press Jesus Christ to give your souls satisfaction as to these dispensations. And then,

3. Another peculiar duty, required in such a season, is to mourn for the sins that are in the world. That is recommended to us, Ezek. ix. When God had given commission unto the sword to slay both old and young, he spared only them that mourned for the abominations that were done in the land. We come short in our duty in that matter, in being affected with the sins of the worst of men. God being dishonoured, the Spirit of God blasphemed, the name of God reproached in them; we ought to mourn for their abominations. We mourn for the sins among God's people, but we ought also to mourn for those abominations others are guilty of; for their idolatries, murders, bloodshed, uncleanness, for all the abominations that the lands about us, as well as our own, are filled with. It is our duty, in such a season, to mourn for them, or we do not sanctify the name of God, and shall not be found prepared for those difficult dispensations of God's providence, which are coming upon us.

4. The fourth and last peculiar duty, which I shall mention, is to hide ourselves. And how shall we do that? The storm is coming, get an ark, as Noah did, when the flood was coming upon the world, which is stated for a precedent of all judgments in future times.

There are two things required to provide an ark; fear and faith.

(1.) Fear: 'By faith, Noah being moved with fear, prepared an ark.' If he had not been moved with the fear of God's judgments, he would never have provided an ark. It is a real complaint, we are not moved enough with the fear of God's judgments. We talk of dreadful things, as can befall human nature, and expect them every day; but yet we are not moved with fear. 'Yet were they not afraid,' saith Jeremiah, 'nor rent their garments.' Nor do we do so. Habakkuk, upon the view of God's judgments, was in another frame: chap. iii. 16. 'When I heard,' saith he, 'my belly trembled: my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered

into my bones; and I trembled in myself that I might rest in the day of trouble.' This is the way to find rest in the day of God's judgments; we are afraid of being esteemed cowards for fearing God's judgments. And then,

(2.) We cannot well provide an ark for ourselves, unless we be guided by faith, as well as moved by fear. 'By faith Noah prepared an ark.' How many things there are to encourage faith, you have heard; the name, the properties of God, and the accomplishment of the promise of God. By virtue of all those properties encourage faith in providing an ark.

But you will say, We are yet at a loss, what this providing of an ark, and hiding of ourselves is. 'A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself.' God calls us to enter into the chamber of providence, and hide ourselves till the indignation be overpast. If we knew what this was, we should apply ourselves unto it. I will tell you what I think in one instance: give no quiet to your minds, until by some renewed act of faith, you have a strong and clear impression of the promises of God upon your hearts, and of your interest in them. If it be but one promise, it will prove an ark. If under all these seasons, moved with fear, acted by faith, we can but get a renewed sense and pledge of our interest in any one promise of God, we have an ark over us that will endure, whatever the storm be. Think of it, and if nothing else occur to you, apply your minds to it, that you may not wander up and down at uncertainties; but endeavour to have a renewed pledge of your interest in some special promise of God, that it belongs unto you, and it will be an ark in every time of trouble that shall befall you.

DISCOURSE XII.*

I DID at two meetings inquire among ourselves, what was required in the time of approaching judgments and calamities, that the world hath been, and is like to be, filled withal. And God was pleased to guide us to the discovery of the necessary exercise of many graces, and the necessary attendance unto many duties for that end and purpose. And we did design to spend our time this day, to beg that God would give us those graces, and stir them up by his Spirit unto a due exercise; and that he would help us unto such a performance of those duties, that when the Lord Christ shall come by any holy dispensation of his providence, we may be found of him in peace. That was the especial occasion of allotting the present time unto this duty; no ways excluding the reasons, occasions, and matter of prayer, which at other times we attend to for ourselves, the church, and the nation.

I would offer a few words that may stir us up unto this duty.

The Scripture doth everywhere, upon all such occasions, call expressly unto us for a special preparation, by the exercise of grace in reformation and holiness. 'Judgment must begin at the house of God:' and what will be the end of them 'that obey not the gospel?' What then is our duty? Why, saith he, 'seeing that all these things shall be dissolved' (all this outward frame of things), 'what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?' Brethren, we ought at all times to attend unto all holy conversation and godliness; but, saith the apostle, the approach of judgment is a peculiar motive thereunto: 'seeing that all these things are to be dissolved.' It is true, seeing Christ hath died for us, washed us in his blood, and given his Holy Spirit unto us, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' But the great motives are not exclusive of occasional exercises, but give an addition unto them. 'Take heed that you be not overtaken with surfeiting and drunkenness,' with any excess in the use of the creature. What if it be so? 'Then that day will come upon you at unawares.'

* Delivered March 14, 1678.

The day when all shall be dissolved; the day of judgment, the day of approaching calamities. You ought at all times to take care of these things, but if your minds are not influenced in the consideration of the approach of that day, 'you are not my disciples.' I do not at all speak unto what preparations are required.

I could also reflect on those places, where God expresseth his great displeasure against such, who did not labour for a peculiar preparation upon approaching calamities. Isa. xxii. 12—14. 'I called for mourning, and fasting, and girding with sackcloth;' and you betook yourselves unto feasting on all occasions: 'Surely, saith the Lord, this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till ye die.' And it is reckoned among the sins of the most profligate persons, that when God's hand is lifted up, and ready to strike, they will not see, so as to learn righteousness; Isa. xxvi. 11.

Let us therefore beg for grace. Though God multiplieth warnings, makes appearances of mercy, and then writes death upon them, and entangles every thing in darkness; yet our work goes slowly on in preparation. Cry earnestly unto God for such supplies of his grace and Spirit, that may effectually bring us unto him: that we may no longer abide in the frame wherein we are.

There are three things, and no more, that I know of (others may be named, but they may be reduced unto these three heads), that are required of us in reference unto approaching judgments. And there is not one of them through which we can pass, or which we can perform in a due manner comfortably unto ourselves, and unto the glory of God, without we have some singular and eminent preparation for it. And they are these:

First, That we ourselves stand in the gap to turn away the threatened judgments.

Secondly, That we may be fit for deliverance, if it please the Lord graciously to give it unto us; saith Christ, speaking of great calamities, 'Lift up your heads, for the day of your salvation draws nigh.'

Thirdly, That we may cheerfully and comfortably go through the calamities, if they shall overtake us.

These three are comprehensive of all the threats of ap-

proaching judgments and darkness that encompass us at this day. Now there is not one of them that we can be any way fit for, unless our hearts and lives are brought into an extraordinary preparation, according as God calls and requires. I do not know whether we believe these things or no, but they will be shortly found to be true.

First, Who dares among us to propose himself to stand in the gap, to divert judgments from the nation, otherwise than in a formal manner, who is not prepared by these things we have spoken of, and hath not some good and comfortable persuasion of his own personal interest in Christ, and hath not freed himself from those sins that have procured these judgments, and who lives not in a resignation of himself unto the will of God? Who dares to do this? We shall provoke God, if we think to stand in the gap, and turn away judgments from the nation; when we see ourselves are concerned in procuring those judgments.

Secondly, We cannot be meet for deliverance, unless we are thus prepared. I have heard a notion preached, and spoken upon other occasions, which I confess I never liked; and the more I consider it, the more I dislike it; and that is, that God, in the deliverance of his people, works for his own name's sake, that he may have all the glory, that it shall be seen merely to be of grace; and therefore he will oftentimes deliver his people, when they are in an unreformed and unreforming condition, that he may shame them and humble them by his mercy and grace afterward. I know no rule of Scripture upon which this notion may be grounded, nor one instance or example whereby it may be made out.

Here lies the truth of it: when there are two things concurring in the deliverance of the church, God will deliver them notwithstanding all their sins and unworthiness, without any previous humiliation in themselves. First, When God hath fixed and limited a certain season in his word and promise for their deliverance. And, secondly, When antecedent unto their deliverance they want means for humiliation. God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt, when they were in a very bad condition, an ignorant, stubborn, faithless generation. But both these things were concurring. God was engaged in point of his promise, that

at the end of four hundred and thirty years he would visit and deliver them. And they were deprived of all ordinances of worship in Egypt: not a sacrifice could they offer, while they were there; not a sabbath, I believe, though it is not expressed in Scripture, could they observe. The way of worship and knowledge of God was taken from them. So when God delivered the children of Israel out of Babylon, they were in no very good condition; but God was engaged in point of promise as to that time, that at the end of seventy years they should be delivered. And in Babylon they had no means for instruction or reformation, no temple, no sacrifice; these were denied. But whenever God doth afford unto persons all the means of grace for humiliation, reformation, and turning unto himself, it may be as good as ever they shall in this world; that God did ever deliver that people out of their distresses, when they refused to be reformed, humbled, or to turn unto him, neither instances of Scripture, nor God's dealing with his church will make this good. Therefore it is vain for us to expect any thing of this nature. If indeed for so many years we had been thrown into a wilderness condition, and had no preaching, no assemblies, no administration of ordinances, no warnings or charges from God; we might have expected the Lord would have given us deliverance. But to us who have had all these things, and yet will not make use of what we have now at present, we have no ground to expect any such thing. Therefore, I confess, neither by rule, instance, or example, do I expect deliverance, until God come in to work a thorough change and reformation in our hearts and lives, which makes it very necessary to be preparing to meet God in the way of his judgments.

Thirdly, The third thing that may lie before us is, how we may cheerfully go through the calamities which may overtake us. I will say no more unto that, because it is that which we did expressly insist upon in our former discourse. As to the best of us, who have been long in the ways of God, woful will be our surprisal, when the days of calamity come, if we have lived in negligence of complying with the calls and warnings of God, that we have had, to bring ourselves unto a more even and better frame. We shall find our strength to fail us, and have our comforts to seek; and be

left to inward darkness, when outward darkness increaseth, and not know whither to cause our sorrows to go.

These things, brethren, I thought fit to mention unto you, that if it be the will of God, they may be of use to take us off from those false hopes, and false expectations, which we are wonderfully ready to feed ourselves withal in such a day as this is wherein we live. It is high time for us to be calling upon God for this end.

DISCOURSE XIII.

The prophet Daniel tells us, when he understood by books, namely, the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, that the time wherein the great contest between Babylon and the church was to have its issue, was come to a point, 'Then,' saith he, 'I set my face to seek the Lord with prayer and supplications, and fasting.' And if you will read his prayer, you will find nothing of confidence, nothing of self-ascription, but a deep acknowledgment of sin: 'We, our kings, our princes, our fathers,' our church, 'have all sinned;' so as that 'to us belongeth shame and confusion of face.' And never had such shame and confusion of face befallen the church, as would have befallen them, if they had been disappointed in that trial. But he adds, 'unto thee belongs mercy and forgiveness.' There he issues the whole business, upon mercy and forgiveness, though he knew by books that the time was come.

Truly, brethren, we do not know by any Scripture revelation, as he did, that the time is come wherein the long contest and conflict between Babylon and the church will have its issue; but it looks like it in the book of providence, and so like it, that it is a plain duty we should give ourselves unto prayer and supplication, that it do not issue in shame and confusion of face, which belongeth unto us by reason of our sins. It is that contest which is now under consideration, and which seems to be coming to its issue, and all men are in expectation of it. It is the greatest, save one, that ever was. For the greatest contest that ever was in this world, was between the person and the gospel of Christ on

the one hand; and the devil and the pagan world on the other. And the next to that is the contest between Christ in his offices and grace, in his gospel and worship; and antichrist. And it is at this day upon its trial, in as signal an instance as ever it received. The question is, as to us and our posterity; whether Christ, or antichrist; whether the worship of God, or of idols; whether the effusion, and waiting for the effusion of the Spirit of God in his worship, or for all manner of superstitious impositions. This is the present contest; and it may be under heaven there never was a more signal instance of the issue of this contest, than will be in these nations in these days; I do not say presently or speedily, but this you all know is our state.

I mention it only to let you know, that there is more than an ordinary earnestness and fervency of spirit, and wrestling with God required of us at this day, for the case of Zion, the interest of Christ, and defeating of his adversaries. What way God will work we know not. If he be at work, he hath said, that when a flood was cast out of the mouth of the dragon, to swallow up the woman everywhere (and we have had a flood cast out of the mouth of the dragon to swallow up the whole interest of Christ in this nation), the earth lifted up herself, and helped the woman, and turned aside the flood. Good old Eli's heart trembled for the ark of God. The interest of God, and the truths of Christ are yet among us; but hardly beset by the Philistines: and whether they may not take them I know not, God only knows. But assuredly, brethren, our hearts ought now to tremble for the ark of God, that God would continue it among us, and not give his glory into the hands of the adversary.

I have mentioned these things, only for this end, that if God will, our hearts may be a little warmed upon all occasions in this great contest and conflict between Christ and antichrist, to come in with our prayers to the help of the Lord, and of the ark of the Lord, that we may see a blessed issue of this trial, and not be covered with that shame and confusion of face which belongeth unto us.

DISCOURSE XIV.*

This meeting is for conference, and I would ask you a few questions.

First, Whether do you think there are extraordinary calls and warnings of God towards this nation at this time?

Secondly, If there be, what is the voice of these calls?

Thirdly, Whether any sort of men, believers, or churches, are exempted from attending unto, and complying with, these calls of God? For there lies a reserve in our hearts. The nation is very wicked (I shall not repeat the sins of the nation), the warning is general to the nation, the body of the people, and God testifies his displeasure against them. Now the inquiry is, Whether there be any rule, that we, who profess ourselves believers, and a church, should count ourselves exempted from a particular compliance with these extraordinary calls of God, that they are for others, and not for us? 'If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent;' Job ix. 23. And the good figs went first into captivity.

Fourthly, What have we done hitherto in order to it, that may evidence itself to be an answer to a compliance with these calls of God, which we have owned here before the Lord? We have been speaking of it, and it becomes me to judge that we have had good and sincere desires after it. And neither the church, nor any one in the church, shall have any reflections from me beyond evidence. It becomes me to judge, that we have had in ourselves good intentions, and sincere endeavours after it; though they have been, it may be, no way suitable or proportionable to the present occasion: and therefore I must say, that in an eminent and extraordinary manner, as yet, we have done nothing; we have not consulted of it yet, what we should do, and 'what it is' in particular 'that the Lord our God requireth of us;' nor declared our designs and intentions for a universal compliance with these great calls of God, for repentance and turning unto the Lord. I mourn over myself night and day, I mourn over you continually. I do not see that life and

* Delivered February 15, 1680.

vigour in returning unto God, either in our persons, or in our church relation, as I could desire. And give me leave to say from an experience in my own heart, I am jealous over you. We may proceed to consider something of outward duties afterward; but as yet we are not at all come to it, but only to inquire into our hearts what we have done in compliance with these calls of God in the reformation and change of our hearts, and vigour of spirit in walking with him. I speak it with all tenderness, that none might take offence; but I do acknowledge to you, that I have not myself attained, nor can I, though I am labouring to bring my heart to that frame, which God requireth in us all at this time: I find many obstructions: if you have attained, I shall rejoice in it with all my heart and soul; but if not, help them that are labouring after it. I intend no more at present but this, to settle upon our souls a conviction that we have not as yet answered the calls of God in the heart; for if we have all apprehensions we have complied, the work is at an end.

I hope we may in due time go on to consider all the ways and instances whereby we may reform and return unto God; but in the mean time I offer this to you, that unless the foundation of it be laid in a deep and broken sense of our past miscarriages and present frames, and I can see in the church some actings of a renewed spirit, with vigour and earnestness to pursue our recovery and return to God, I shall much despond in this thing. But let us be persuaded that we are to lay this foundation, I desire we may agree upon this, that it is our duty to get a deep sense upon our hearts (as the first thing God aims at in his calls) of our past miscarriages, and of our present dead, wretched frame, in comparison of that vigour, liveliness, and activity of grace that ought to be found in us. Ought we not to lay the foundation here? If so, then we ought to apply ourselves unto it. It may be, though it be so with some, that they have such a lively, vigorous acting of faith in a deep and humble sense of their past miscarriages, yet it is not so with others; and we are looking for the edification of the whole. And therefore, brethren, do we judge it our present duty to labour to affect our hearts deeply with a sense of our present unan-

swerable frame unto the mind of God and Christ, and of our past miscarriages.

If it be so, let us every day pray, that God would keep this thing in the imagination of the thoughts of our hearts, not only of ourselves, but of one another. Observe the phrase of the Holy Ghost: when you come to 'the thoughts of the heart,' you think you can go no farther; but saith David, I pray, O Lord, preserve this 'in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people:' that is, in the first internal framing of our thoughts. There must be a frame acting and coining thoughts (if I may so say), continually in us to this purpose. But I recommend this to you, that if this be a truth, and we are convinced it is our duty to labour to affect our hearts with a sense of the unanswerableness of our souls, and the frame of our minds into the will of God and the holiness of Christ, who is coming to visit his churches, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' Not such as we have been. We should labour for a deep sense of this, and I hope it may not be unsuitable unto you; for if any of us have any corruption, temptation, or disorder in our spirits and ways to conflict withal, in vain, believe me, shall we contend against it, unless we lay this foundation.

I know one great means for the beginning, and carrying on of this work, is by earnest crying unto God by prayers and supplications, and humiliations. I am loath to issue it there, I have seen so many days of humiliation without reformation, that I dare not issue it there, we shall make use of them as God shall help us. I desire the church would do so, if they find in themselves a sense of duty and a heart crying to God in sincerity and truth. I have now been very long, though very unprofitable, in the ministration of the word; and I have observed the beginning of churches, and wish I do not see the end of them in this their confidence of mere profession, and the observation of these duties of humiliation. God knows, I have thought often of this thing, and, I say, I dare not issue it there. Let us have as many as we have hearts for, and no more; and as many as shall end with reformation, but no more. But let us all begin among ourselves; and who knows but that God may

give wisdom to this church? I am ready to faint, and give over, and to beg of the church, they would think of some other person to conduct them in my room without these disadvantages. The last day will discover I have nothing but a heart to lead you in the ways of God to the enjoyment of God.

END OF VOL. XVI.

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